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BY

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CHAPTER I

"If good the news, O bird, alight and welcome;
If bad, draw up thy claws and hie away!"

At the corner of a lofty housetop overlooking a great part of Cairo, a woman stood with arms uplifted and solemnly addressed a crow which seemed about to settle. The bird, as if the meaning of the chant had reached him, turned in the air with clumsy flapping, and withdrew, rising to join the hundreds of his kind which circled high above the city bathed in early sunlight. The woman shook her fist at his receding shape, glass bracelets tinkling on her strong brown arm. She sighed, "The curse of God on thy religion, O thou faithless messenger!" then, with a laugh, turned round to join the group of slave-girls, her companions, sent up to lay out herbs to dry upon the roof. These had watched her invocation of the crow with knowing grins. But one, a young Circassian, who sat watching while the others worked, betrayed surprise and asked the meaning of the little ceremony.

At that there was much giggling.

"Knowest thou not, O flower? It is the woman's secret!"

"Secret of secrets, all unknown of men!"

"By Allah, men know nothing of it. In sh'Allah, they will be astonished some day!"

"O Hind, relate the story! Our honey, our gazelle, Gulbeyzah, has not heard it."

Thus urged, the one who had adjured the crow, a free servant of the house, obsequious towards the slaves, its pampered children, explained as she knelt down again to work:

"In the name of Allah, thus it is related: Know, O my sweet, that, in the days of our lord Noah (may God bless him), after the flood, the men and women were in equal numbers and on equal terms. What then? Why, naturally they began disputing which should have the right to choose in marriage, and, as the race increased, enjoy more mates than one. The men gave judgment on their own behalf, as usual; and when the women made polite objection, turned and beat them. What was to be done? The case was thus: the men were stronger than the women, but there exists One stronger than the men — Allah Most High. The women sought recourse to Allah's judgment; but — O calamity! — by ill advice they made the crow their messenger. The crow flew off towards Heaven, carrying their dear petition in his claws, and from that day to this he brings no answer. But God is everliving and most merciful; a thou-

sand years with him seem but an hour. Perhaps he does but hold our favour over, as might a son of Adam, till the evening for reflection, to grant it at the last. In sh'Allah!"

"In sh'Allah!" came the chorus of a dozen voices; followed by a general laugh when Gulbeyzah, the Circassian, yawned and sighed, "Four goodly husbands all my own! O Lord, give quickly!"

"That is the reason," Hind concluded, "why good women have a word to say to crows who seek to settle. Any one of them may be the bearer of the blessed edict. The reason as related — Allah knows!"

"Good news and hopeful, by my maidenhood! — the best I ever heard!" chuckled Gulbeyzah, reposing with her back against the parapet. She then remained a long while silent, lost in day-dreams.

The hour was after sunrise of a spring morning in the twelve hundred and eightieth year of the Hegirah, the second of the reign of Ismaîl. The house was that of Muhammad Pasha Sâlih, a Turk by origin but born and bred in Egypt, who held a high position in the government. The girls, their task accomplished, sat down on their heels, each with her tray of basketwork before her, and sniffed the breeze, in no haste to return indoors.

"Praise to Allah," one exclaimed with fervour, "we escape for an hour from that Gehennum there below. Never have I seen the lady Fitnah so enraged. Her wrath is not so much because her son

desires the English governess, as because the Pasha sees no hindrance to the match. I tremble every time I have to go to her, lest in her fury she should damage my desirability."

"Praise be to Allah, I am not her property," replied another, "but that of her durrah, the great lady. Yet I know her for a good and pious creature, not likely to be so enraged without rare cause. They say this foreign teacher has bewitched the young man. He is mad. He flung himself before her in the passage as she came from driving. She spurned him, and they bore him, senseless, to his chamber, where for two days he weeps and moans, refusing nourishment. It is enchantment, evidently, for the girl is ugly."

"Nay, by Allah, she is white and nicely rounded. But shameless! But an infidel!"

"She can change her faith."

"As easily as dung can change its odour!"

"Gulbeyzah here is whiter and more appetizing."

"Well, God alone knows what she is or is not. This is sure: I have no itching to go down into the house while Fitnah Khânum rages."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" exclaimed the rest with feeling.

The morning clamour of the city came up to them as a soothing murmur. Minarets dreamed round them in the sun-haze which was rosy at its heart but in the distance pearly with a tinge of brown. On

one hand open country might be seen, green fields and palm trees crowding to the desert wave on which three pyramids stood out, minute as ciphers; on the other, ending the long ridge of the Mucattam Hill, arose the Citadel in smoky shadow, its Turkish dome and minarets, its towers and ramparts, appearing like a city of the sky. Here and there among the housetops a small cloud of doves went up, fluttered a moment and subsided peacefully. Kites hovered, crows were circling, in the upper air. Gulbeyzah watched their evolutions dreamily.

"Allah defend us from the liberty of Frankish women!" she remarked at length. "I could not bear it. To meet the stare of all men were too dreadful. My maidenhood would flush my brain and kill me. O pure shame! And yet they choose what men they like, the fact is known. In sh'Allah, the great favour, when the crow does bring it, will not destroy our blessed privacy."

"In sh'Allah, truly!" answered Hind, with vehemence. "Fear nothing, O beloved; God is greatest! Their freedom is from Satan, their liege lord — the curse of Allah on him! It is a travesty of God's work, like all he does. Is it not known when Allah made the cow, he tried his best to do the same, but got no farther than the water-buffalo. All Heaven mocked him. Our charter, when it comes, will be perfection."

"Talking of foreign women makes me curious to

know how things are going, down below. Has the governess consented to give life to Yûsuf? Has the Pasha quieted the lady Fitnah?"

"Nothing could quiet her, unless it were the quick expulsion of the Englishwoman. Why did she ever have her children taught the lore of infidels? The fault is hers! She hoped to keep the Bey from honourable marriage, chaining his fancy with some slave-girl, her own creature."

"With me, say plainly!" laughed Gulbeyzah, with a yawn. "I was brought into the house with that intention. Yet not her creature, for Murjânah Khânum is my mistress, and she would have seen to it that I was well respected. If the governess has pity on him — which I think not likely — as soon would the wild serpent wed the dove — my lady must provide me with a proper husband. I have no mind to wither as a fruit untasted." She yawned again. "Will no one go into the house and bring me news?"

Up leapt a little Galla girl, a child as yet unveiled, all eyes and teeth with glee in the adventure.

"I go, O lady! I am not afraid. I will even enter the selamlik. I will find out everything."

"Be very careful, O Fatûmah, lest old Fitnah seize thee. She would rip up thy belly and pluck out thy entrails did she catch thee spying!"

The little black girl laughed and made an impudent grimace.

"And then the eunuchs! They will surely beat thee."

"By Allah, they must catch me first. Sawwâb adores me, and the others are too slow."

"Good. Run, ere curiosity consume me!"

The little negress shot off like an arrow. Down dark, malodorous stairs, through empty corridors, she glanced, incarnate mischief. In a pleasure court of the harîm, where orange trees in tubs grew round a pool, she stopped to listen for the voice of Fitnah. It came from an apartment on her right. Straight forward, where she wished to go, the coast seemed clear. Springing on tiptoe, she plucked a spray of blossom from the nearest tree; then ran on down a passage through the ornate screen, the boundary of the women's quarters, where a eunuch tried in fun to stop her; and in sight of a great hall where men were lounging, knocked at a door.

The word had scarce been given ere she glided in and held out the sprig of orange-blossom to the English governess, with every muscle of her body fawning, smiling. Without a look, she read the stranger's face, perceived she had been crying lately but now looked exultant, observed the order of the room, the foreign furniture; and then, before the Englishwoman could find words to thank her for the pretty offering, kissed a white hand which proved as hot as fire, and darted out as noiselessly as she had entered.

As she was flitting back across the garden-court, she heard a male voice cry:

"Be silent, woman; or, by the Prophet, I shall have to beat thee!"

Crouching behind a tub, she listened eagerly. But though a wrangle was in progress not far off between the Pasha and his wife, the lady Fitnah, she could glean no more than the main tenor of it from the voices, of which the man's was irritated and the woman's mad.

At last the Pasha shouted:

"It is finished. No word more. I go straight to the Consul. Appeal to the Câdi, I beseech thee; of thy kindness, do so! He will tell thee, just as I do, that thou art demented."

Another minute and he crossed the court, wearing his best tarbûsh and his official garb of black frock-coat and narrow trousers — a thing unheard of at that early hour.

Having seen him pass to the selamlik, Fatûmah ran like lightning through the dim old house, till, breathless, she emerged in dazzling sunlight and flopped down on the roof again beside the others.

"Well, what news?" they clamoured.

"Great news!" Fatûmah panted. "Only listen! The English governess is going to marry Yûsuf Bey, and she has islamed!"

"Praise to Allah!" cried the others in amazement. "A Frankish woman convert! A great miracle!"

"The Pasha goes this minute to the English Consul, to confer with him and make arrangements for the ceremony."

"Allahu akbar! Is it possible? But what says Fitnah?"

"What can she say, the poor one? The command is on her."

"But, for the love of Allah, say, how didst thou learn all this?"

Fatûmah shut her lips tight, looking preternaturally cunning.

"Ha, ha!" was all she answered.

"Her tale is nonsense! She is making game of us," exclaimed Gulbeyzah, breaking out in laughter. "She was not gone five minutes, that is known. Thou shalt be paid full measure, little poison-flower! Confess now that thy story is all lies!"

The marvel was that every word proved true.

CHAPTER II

Muhammad Pasha Sâlih was intensely worried. As he drove toward the English Consul's office, he let deep furrows ravage his benignant brow, and combed his long grey beard with nervous fingers. The ever-shifting crowds, the eager faces, the laden camels rolling on like ships upon the sea of heads; the water-sellers clinking their brass cups, the cries of salesmen and the floating odours — all the pageant of the streets and all their rumour, which filled the sunlight and seemed one with it, went by unnoticed.

In youth he had been wedded to a noble Turkish lady, the sweetest and most gentle of companions. Never an angry word had passed between them. But, alas! when all her children died soon after birth, Murjânah Khânum had grown melancholy and retired from life. She still dwelt in his house, was still the nominal head of his harîm; but for more than twenty years she had been dead to pleasure. At first he had amused himself with pretty slaves, being reluctant to infringe her dignity of only wife. Then, at her instance, for she feared debauch for him, he had espoused the daughter of a wealthy native, whom the caprice of a former ruler had exalted. The marriage, besides raising his importance, had

brought him four male children. Yet at this moment, with the curses of the termagant still ringing in his ears, he almost wished he had let well alone and kept to concubines.

Allah knew that Yûsuf's malady was not uncommon at his age; the cure self-evident. The governess was not a heathen. She was of those who have received the Scriptures, therefore marriageable. Moreover, being, as he shrewdly guessed, of no consideration in her native land, she might be tempted by a life of wealth and ease. To save his son from death, he had besought the Englishwoman, imagining that her consent would fill the house with joy-cries. Yet when the cause was won, the only possible objection cancelled by the girl's unlooked-for turn to El Islâm, behold! the lady Fitnah's grief was changed to fury. The wrangle with her had perturbed him at a moment when he stood in need of all his wits to brave the Consul. Well, Allah saw what trials he endured!

The carriage drew up in a quiet alley, before a gateway ornamented with a coloured picture of lions great and small in funny attitudes. Two Cawasses in silver-braided jackets with long dangling sleeves rose from stools beside the threshold and saluted. Muhammad Pasha passed between them, crossing a courtyard to a second door, wide open like the first. There, in a whitewashed room, two Copts sat at a table, cutting pens. They both sprang up at recognition of the visitor and strove to kiss his hands,

which he prevented by patting each upon the shoulder kindly.

"Is the Consul busy, O my children?" he inquired. "I have an errand of importance. Please inform him."

"Upon my head. I go at once, by Allah!"

One of the Copts leapt to an inner door and knocked thereon. Enjoined to enter, he opened it just far enough for the introduction of his body, and slipped in. Anon returning in the same respectful manner, he beckoned to the Pasha. Then he flung the door wide open, and stood aside, with eyes downcast and hands demurely folded.

Muhammad Pasha entered with a beating heart. His mission was of essence delicate, and he was anxious to avoid all odour of offence towards a foreign representative possessing influence. Having touched hands with the Consul and exchanged greetings, he sat down on the extreme edge of a chair, and toying with his amber rosary, thus broached his business: —

"Monsieur le Consul,"— the conversation was in French of the Byzantine school, —"you remember the young lady whom you were good enough to recommend as an instructress for my children. Can you inform me of her origin, her previous history?"

"Excellency, I only know what she herself confided: that she was educated at a religious institution for poor children of good family. She has no relatives. She came here to be governess in an English house which, by the father's sudden death, was

brought to poverty two weeks before she came. She found herself here without a situation and with little money; and as she was well recommended and impressed me as respectable, I thought of you, remembering that you desired an English governess. I trust that you are satisfied of her efficiency?"

"Altogether. She has been a month now in our house, and almost is become like one of us. She is so charming. It is there, the trouble. She is ravishing. Monsieur le Consul,"— here the Pasha changed his tone for that of one who bares his heart, discarding courtesies, —"I am very gravely troubled. The anxiety I suffer cuts digestion and gives me frightful belly-pains. My son adores this demoiselle, and she adores him. The affair deprives me of all taste for food. You see my sufferings!"

"Continue, Excellency!" said the Consul grimly. He got up from his chair and paced the room. The Pasha kept the corner of an eye upon him, as he proceeded:

"What can I do? The demoiselle has been secluded from my household, as I promised you. But youth leaps boundaries; love can speak through walls. My son has seen her in the passages — their eyes have met — What know I? Youth is fatal."

Here the Pasha wiped his eyes.

"Monsieur le Consul, when I heard of this two days ago, I put my son in prison; I went myself and reasoned with the demoiselle. I have reasoned with them both, entreated, threatened; but without result.

I fear my son will die if he may not espouse her. The demoiselle implores me not to cast her forth. She says — it is so touching! — that we are her only friends, that she never met with kindness till she came to us."

"Beg her to come this afternoon and see me," pronounced the Englishman, whose face had darkened by perceptible gradations as he listened.

"That is precisely what I come to ask: that you will scold her. God knows how the responsibility has weighed upon me. She is not the match I should myself have chosen for my son; but still I should be glad of the alliance, because of the esteem I have for all the English. I stand impartial in the case and greatly worried."

"Thank you, Excellency. Send her to me this afternoon. Is there anything else?"

The Pasha had already risen to depart.

"One thing." He dropped his voice to a stage whisper. "In the frenzy of her love she asks to be of our religion. She has made an oath of her conversion before witnesses. (The Consul swore.) But have no care. We will forget it, if"— the Pasha laid great stress on the condition, and for once looked boldly in the other's eyes —"if, after consultation with you, she should wish to recant."

"But you say that there are witnesses to her conversion," cried the Frank, with bitterness. "I fail to see how it can be forgotten. There would be a riot."

"The witnesses are of my house," rejoined the Pasha suavely. "My command is guarantee of their discretion."

"Send her to me!" The final words were uttered from tight lips beneath a formidable frown, as the Consul flung the door wide open for the Turk's departure.

"Sont-ils fanatiques, ces brutes-là? Peuh!" respired the Pasha, shaking the dust from off his boots as he regained his carriage. "The girl will have a cruel hour, poor floweret! That dog would like to kill her. But, God be praised, the law of El Islâm is still sufficient to protect a convert in a Muslim land!"

His thoughts of the lone foreign girl were full of kindness. She was his daughter. He would care for her true happiness. And then the thought of Fitnah's rage, recurring, caused him to frown, and swear, and gnaw his underlip.

CHAPTER III

Immediately on his return to his own house, Muhammad Pasha sent a eunuch to announce his coming to the lady Fitnah. He found her lying on a couch in her state room. Two slaves, who had been busy fanning her, retired before him. Seeing she lay still with eyes closed as if quite exhausted, he drew near and whispered:

"Now, in sh'Allah, O beloved, thou wilt hear my reasons."

She opened great brown eyes, bloodshot with wrath, and glared at him a moment.

"Well, what news?" she asked, with studied coldness.

The Pasha then embarked upon his story; but, at mention of the Consul, she sprang up with rage renewed, expectorating:

"Curse thy father! 'She will see the Consul,' sayest thou? The Consul! May the Consul and his whole race rot with agony! It is simply to evade a duty which is thine and thine alone. Eject her from the house at once, thou paltry coward! She will kill our son. I know thy guile, by Allah! Thou wilt say, 'The Consul orders her to marry Yûsuf. We must obey the Consul,'— O salvation! — when

all the while thyself art father of the mischief. Oh, let her not come here or, by my fruitfulness! these hands shall cling to her and not leave hold till they have made her so that no man could desire her."

Expostulation proving vain, her lord retired in great annoyance. He had to fear a scandal in his house, an inquisition by the Consul, ignominy, if Yûsuf's mother came in contact with the English lady.

In this dilemma, as in every other which concerned the household, he went for counsel to his only love and first of wives. He sent a herald of his coming to Murjânah Khânum, and after a decent interval repaired to her apartments. She received him in a large room, with no other solid furniture than a low desk on which a manuscript of the Corân lay open; but exquisitely clean and sweet, a contrast to those quarters of the house where Fitnah reigned. The windows were constructed of the finest lattice-work, which made the light within seem rare and delicate. Murjânah, old but stately, fondled her lord's hand.

"Thy face is careworn," she exclaimed, perusing it. "In sh'Allah, all the news is good."

"In sh'Allah," he replied mechanically. "But Allah knows that I am greatly troubled. I know not what to do." And he proceeded to describe the madness of the lady Fitnah. At the tale's conclusion, a light laugh surprised him.

"Thou askest what to do," exclaimed Murjânah, "when there is danger that a foolish woman, mad

with jealousy, may harm a guest of ours! Hear the word of Allah: 'When ye have cause to fear their disobedience, ye shall reprimand them, ye shall banish them to beds apart, and ye shall beat them.' Is not that plain? Beat her! It is thy sacred duty. No, no, she will not cry against thee to the Câdi. She will hide her fault. All women look to men for government, and if it is withheld, have cause of grief. Trust me, beloved, there is no good woman who would not rather suffer stripes occasionally than grow for lack of them into a shrieking harridan. Fitnah Khânum is my durrah, and I love her truly, as the mother of our darling children, and for many virtues. Still I say to thee on this occasion: beat her soundly. Bestow on her a perfect beating, O my soul!"

The Pasha kissed his old wife's hand submissively, and went forth from her presence with a face of awe. The high proceeding needed courage, for a man so kindly. He went to the small chamber where the eunuchs sat when not on duty, and called, "Sawwâb! Meymûn! Bring me a big kurbâj. Attend me, both of you!"

The silent, swift obedience of those servants showed the impression made by his unusual sternness. Their help was necessary that the scene to come might wear the aspect of an execution, not a struggle.

Whip in hand, Muhammad Pasha crossed a courtyard and entered a small room remote from others.

"Bring Fitnah Khânum hither secretly!" he told the eunuchs.

Sawwâb, the fat, was seized with trembling; while Meymûn, a tall, gaunt creature, gave a deathlike grin. They sped, however. Three minutes had not passed before the lady Fitnah, deftly bound and gagged, was borne into the lonely chamber and the door was shut.

Half an hour later, Muhammad Pasha Sâlih sat conversing with the English lady, preparing her intelligence to meet the Consul's arguments, which he forewarned her would be all misstatements born of blind fanaticism. When married to Yûsuf, he assured her, and himself believed it, she would hardly know the difference from an English home.

CHAPTER IV

The English girl, meanwhile, experienced a passionate elation, like new life. The Pasha's exhortations were not needed. Rebellion, which had always lurked beneath her trained subservience, now clothed her in its flames and made her terrible for any one who dared assail her new-found pride.

What had she to regret? From childhood she had been repressed, humiliated, and ordered to be thankful for bare daily bread. In Christian families her lot had been unenviable. Here, in this Muslim household, she was somebody. The month spent here had been the happiest in her life. But, bred up to regard employers as a race apart, — impressed, moreover, by the grandeur of the house and by the rank of Pasha, — she had never dreamt of being thought an equal by her entertainers. When Yûsuf Bey, whom she had noticed for his beauty, assailed her in the hall, she had imagined his intentions far from honourable, judging from past experience in English houses. She had fled to her own rooms, ashamed and angry, while the image of his face alight with passion remained to trouble her against her will. When the Pasha came and begged her in most flattering terms to condescend to marry his un-

worthy son, she nearly swooned. All her resistance sprang from incredulity. When once convinced that the demand was earnest, she gave way with grateful tears. Then her resolve became a living faith. It was to break the bondage of the past completely, to cast in her lot for ever with these friends who wanted her.

They were wealthy, of exalted rank, and yet they wanted her. They thought her lovely, who had always been esteemed entirely plain, with her squat figure, apple cheeks, and sandy hair. The sleekest youth in all the world desired her. It was so marvellous that she was forced to rub her eyes and fix their gaze on homely objects to dispel the sense of some enchantment. The difference of religion gave her no concern; indeed, the change was welcome, she had been so cramped by English pietism. In this mood, she was fire against the Consul. A world of happiness was opened suddenly, and there were those who would debar her from it. Woe betide them!

The Pasha himself escorted her to where a harîm carriage waited. Sawwâb the eunuch held the door for her.

"The carriage will be there to bring you back," the Pasha told her. "I have ordered the servants by no means to return without you, upon pain of death."

The implied suspicion that she might be kidnapped made her laugh.

"Remember, my son's life is in your hands —

such pretty hands! His earthly happiness is trusted to this carriage, all too vile to hold so sweet a burden. Day and night he dreams of nothing but your charms. If your mind changes he will surely die."

She laughed and kissed her fingers to the dear old man, as she stepped up into the carriage. The eunuch slammed the door, which was close-shuttered, leaving her in perfumed shade. A burning blush suffused her as she thought of Yûsuf — his strained, eager face, his yearning lips, beheld that once to haunt her consciousness, a naked shape of love. But pride was uppermost in all her thoughts just then — pride in the comfortable carriage, the attentive servants — pride in her new-found value, in her new-found relatives, and in the daring resolution she had made to break with England. The foreign clamour of the streets, the curious, heady odours, flattered her with a sense of strange adventure.

Radiant, she alighted at the gate which bore the royal arms of England, near which an open carriage also waited, and passed into the Consul's office. She expected sternness, but the Consul smiled agreeably, and after shaking hands with her, took up his hat.

"I have been thinking," he observed, "that all I have to say could be much better said by some one else — a woman. I should be hampered by embarrassment." He smiled. "So, if you don't mind, I have sent a note to Mrs. Cameron, asking leave to bring you out to tea with her this afternoon. I have a carriage at the door."

"I also have a carriage," she replied, with a light laugh, as they went out together. She could not but admire his strategy, for Mrs. Cameron, the leader of the English colony, was a gentlewoman of the straightest Christian outlook, the last person whom a renegade would care to face. She had, moreover, been all kindness to the stranded girl, hospitably entertaining her until she found a situation. Since going to Muhammad Pasha's house the governess had spent a Sunday with her, and heard warnings. To brave her now would be an ordeal, but no matter. The destined bride of Yûsuf scorned all fear.

Out at the gate the Consul eyed her carriage with intense disfavour, especially Sawwâb the eunuch, who stood ready at the door.

"You will kindly come in mine," he said peremptorily.

"Then you will kindly tell the Pasha's man to follow," she replied, with eyes that twinkled laughter at his show of temper.

He shouted to the Pasha's coachman, and got in beside her. For a while they drove in silence, the Consul stealing glances at her face from time to time. She knew that he was struck by the new charm of her. His manner had a dash of gallantry which was amusing.

"I hate to see you in that carriage, with those servants," he exclaimed at length impulsively. "You must forgive me. I have lived here years, and know the country."

Again she laughed and her eyes quizzed him. The thought that she knew more than he did, possibly, was made conviction by his next remark:

"Please realise that you are absolutely free. Whatever may have happened — I mean whatever influences have been brought to bear — those people cannot hurt you now, or even reach you." This man who knew the country suspected the good Pasha of iniquity, and looked upon his palace as a den of vice. She said:

"There has been nothing of the kind. I have never been so kindly treated or so happy."

He hemmed and hawed, remarking:

"Well, remember what I say. And don't forget that, as a British subject here, you have great privileges which, whatever happens, you will be unwise to forfeit. I hope you will confide in Mrs. Cameron. There is no one in this world more kind and trustworthy."

She answered, "Thanks!" and turned from him to contemplate the passing scene. Their carriage flew along a sandy lane between walled gardens of the suburbs, with here and there a mansion closely shuttered towards the street. The road was covered with the long procession of the fellâhîn returning outward to their villages — men straddled over donkeys between empty paniers; women stalked erect and queen-like in their graceful drapery; here and there a camel sauntered, led by some bare-legged boy — the whole, obscured by clouds of dust, illumined

warmly by the rays of the declining sun, or steeped in the deep shadow of mud walls. Footfarers, forced aside to let the carriage pass, stared at its inmates with contemptuous eyes. The garb of Europe was a blot upon the peaceful scene. Her heart went out to all those people, plodding, contented, in the sunlit dust. Henceforth she would be nothing strange to them, she swore it.

"Here we are!" The Consul's voice disturbed her reverie. He shouted to the driver and the carriage stopped. The harîm carriage drew up close behind it. A door in a high wall was opened by a smiling negro. A minute later she was in a cool verandah, looking on a well-kept garden, outside a very English drawing-room.

It was a house where all was tidy and precise, a hostile element to one in love with the untrimmed profusion of the Pasha's palace. She hated it as servants hate a nagging mistress.

"Now, having brought you two together, I shall leave you," said the Consul pleasantly. "This young lady, Mrs. Cameron, has gone and got herself into a precious fix. Confess her thoroughly, and then we'll find some way to get her out of it."

"But I have no desire to get out of it," cried the girl, exasperated. "The fix, as you are pleased to call it, is my greatest happiness."

But the Consul was already gone, delighted as it seemed to wash his hands of her. She found herself alone with Mrs. Cameron.

"We'll have some tea at once, and you must see the children," was that lady's first remark, so different from the attack anticipated that the guest, all nerved for battle, felt defrauded. Though ready to resist with fury, she lacked the energy required to open fight. Tea came, and with it the three tow-haired children, whose presence made all talk impossible. The girl sat moody, in abeyance, replying briefly to remarks addressed to her. The garden perfumes became stronger as the sun sank. They, or some kindred but more subtle influence, obscured her brain with fumes in which her purpose loomed unreal and enormous. The homely scene appealed to her against her will. Almost she had the sense of hands held out to her, while Mrs. Cameron was talking nonsense with the children. This playing on her nerves seemed a mean stratagem. Hot anger grew beneath her careless shell.

At length the youngsters were dismissed. The girl then braced herself to meet the blow. Again she felt a keen pang of deception when her hostess said:

"I am going to ask you a great favour. Stay the night with me! My husband is away at Alexandria. I am really lonely."

"Thank you very much, but it is really quite impossible,"— there was poison in the honey of this sweet reply, — "I have a carriage waiting."

"We can send it with a message."

"No, really, thank you! I have stayed too long

already." She suddenly bethought her of the master move, and rose determined.

"No, sit down, my dear!" cried Mrs. Cameron. "I have to talk to you. And though I would rather have had the night in which to think things over, I must, since you force me to it, speak quite simply now. I say: Don't do it, child! Don't take the step the Consul tells me that you contemplate! He thought that you had been seduced by unfair practices; but that, I see from your behaviour, is not so. It is just the charm of novelty, the spirit of adventure — is it not? — with just, perhaps, a little mischief prompting, a little grudge against the dull life you have led. My love, you must not be allowed to do it — you, an Englishwoman! It degrades us all. I have lived out here for years, and I assure you that, if a daughter of mine declared her will to marry one of them, sooner than it should happen I would kill her with my own hands. A girl! — It is unheard of! With their view of women!"

"It is plain you know nothing about them," sneered the other; "at any rate, about the class of people I have mixed with. They have the greatest reverence for women. You suppose, because we veil — "

"We!" interjected Mrs. Cameron.

"Yes, we; for I am one of those whom you so grossly slander." A drum of battle beat at either temple of the girl thus brought to bay. Her brain reeled with indignation, and her voice grew husky.

"I say, you think because we veil that we are quite degraded, the same as we do when we see your faces bare. The difference is one of custom only. Underneath our veils, in our own houses, we are just as happy and as free as you are. . . . It is too droll! You fancy that Mahometan women have their lives made miserable? Why, I have never known such happy women. From my rooms, I hear them laughing, playing, singing all day long."

"Poor things! They know no other life. You do, and would be miserable in the same conditions. Have you ever thought of what polygamy involves — for women, anyhow?"

"It seems to me extremely sensible and kind to women. It takes into consideration facts which we slur over, cruelly. It gives to every girl a chance of motherhood."

"My dear!" exclaimed the mentor, greatly shocked.

"I don't care what you think. It is quite true."

"You are young and inexperienced. We who live in the country hear of things of which you cannot possibly know anything — things that I wish most heartily that you may never know. That is why I beg of you earnestly to change your mind."

"Nothing will make me do that."

"Then you are honestly in love, and we will say no more on that point." The forbearance was so unexpected that the governess was startled and stared at Mrs. Cameron with unbelieving eyes. The

elder lady showed such trembling earnestness that she grieved for the necessity to shock and wound her. "There remains another question, on an altogether higher plane — I mean the question of religion." Mrs. Cameron's voice turned awestruck. "The Consul tells me — but oh, no! It is too fearful!"

"I don't see why!" returned the other doggedly. "They worship God as we do, and they count Christ as a prophet. They are no more fearful than the Unitarians in England. And I am sure they think much more about religion in their daily lives than people do at home."

"They deny the essence of Christianity — the Redemption. How can you turn your back upon that marvel of Divine Love? Their ideals are all much lower, more material. . . . My dear, I see that you have come here primed with specious arguments, and I regret that I am not clever enough to make you see their falseness. I wish I had the tongues of all the angels at this moment grieving over you, to show you how terrific is the gulf you view so lightly."

The girl laughed nervously. "I don't suppose the angels bother much. You talk as if God only cared for Christians. I'm sure He thinks the Moslems just as valuable. If you are so much better, why don't you mix with them and try to do them good?"

"Some of us are doing so."

"In such a way! . . ."

"We are not discussing missionary methods, dear. Your case is the only one before us."

"Well, you say that missionaries mean to do good in their way; but it never seems to strike you that I may hope to do a little good in mine!"

Her tone grew plaintive; the long contest wearied her. The bloom of shadow on the garden, underneath the rose of sunset, the voices of the evening made her wistful; while the sadness which attends all partings clutched her heart. The whine of doing good had slipped from her at unawares — an echo from her former life of hired hypocrisy. It had been the natural tone of conversation with a lady of the class "employer."

"That rings untrue. You're simply talking for effect!" cried Mrs. Cameron, indignant. "It is unkind when I am speaking from my heart of hearts. . . . Now, only one word more. If you ever loved any one — father, or mother, or friend — at home in England, think of that person and just ask yourself what he or she would think of your denying Christ. The act is so uncalled-for that it seems like wanton wickedness. You can marry your Mahometan without renouncing Christianity, and by so doing you would have more honour in your husband's eyes. You could retain your status as a British subject, which means something here; and if you really have a purpose to do good among those people, you would be in a better position to do so than by sinking to their level."

"I won't hear a word more! Oh, you are brutal!" The girl started up with hands and teeth clenched, past endurance. "Oh, you are brutal to bully me like this! I tell you once for all, I love those people, whom you and all your kind hate and tell lies about. No one was ever really nice to me before. They are a million times better than any Christians I have ever known. I tell you I belong to them, and not to you! I mean to have the same religion as my husband, and if he goes to Hell, well, I'll go too! Do you understand?" Her words now came in gusts, for she was sobbing heavily. "You'll never see me any more, of course, for I'm a wicked Moslem and you're so fanatical! I don't care; I can do without you. I have truer friends, who really like me and don't only patronise. Oh, how can you make me cry like this, when I was so — so happy!"

To her surprise, she found herself in her tormentor's arms.

"You wrong me, dear. I'm not fanatical, nor yet so narrow-minded as you think. Now, will you promise that, whatever happens, you will look upon me as a friend and come to see me sometimes? I have said all I can to dissuade you, because I fear you may repent of your decision when too late. My hope is, now and always, that you may be happy. You'll promise, won't you, still to make a friend of me?"

The girl nodded, sobbing, speechless with emotion.

"Well, then, God bless you, dear, among the Mos-

lems, and may you always bear the standard of true Christian womanhood!"

With that two-edged blessing in her ears, the renegade, a bowed and shrinking figure, traversed the garden in the blue of twilight. She felt guilty and unnerved, irresolute, until she saw the Pasha's carriage waiting in the lane, when pride returned. The tears yet wet upon her cheeks, she stood erect and sniffed the evening air. There was still much traffic on the sandy road, running between dark garden-walls to where, beside a little dome, a single palm-plume stood up black against the sky. The dust kicked up by donkeys' hoofs, by people's footsteps, rose greenish like wood-smoke. Some wayfarers already carried lighted lanterns which made coloured circles in the gloaming like the peacock's eyes. A life of passionate adventure lay before her, most curious and rich and warm with human failings, much better worth than that which she had left behind.

Sawwàb the eunuch held the carriage door for her, and murmured "Praise to Allah!" as he shut her in. She saw him merely as a well-trained servant, having as yet no inkling of his grim significance.

CHAPTER V

Muhammad Pasha Sâlih went again to see the Consul, this time upon receiving a peremptory summons. He came away with smart sensations of indignity, the unbeliever having warned him to take care of his behaviour to the English governess. The marriage contract, he was told, must be in order, and every detail of her treatment strictly honourable. These admonitions thrown as to a dog, to him, the known embodiment of goodness, made him cry. When he got home it was to find a note from the Grand Câdi, requesting him to call at once upon that dignitary, who besought him, for the honour of the Faith, to be precise in all his dealings with the English convert. And when, that afternoon, he waited in his duty on the lord of Egypt, that prince demanded tidings of the Englishwoman and, jesting, told him to be sure and use her kindly.

"She must be a rare pearl," the sovereign chuckled. "The English Representative is maddened by her loss. By God and His Apostle, I have half a mind to snatch her from thee."

For one whose house had always been a guarded sanctuary, who never made nor brooked the least allusion to his women, such language from licentious lips, in hearing of the throng of courtiers, was sheer

ignominy. He cursed the parents and religion of the English Consul, the cause of this indecent noising of a private matter. The dog appeared to fancy that he had to do with fellâhîn or small officials; for he had spoken of the facility of divorce and the danger of the Englishwoman being cast adrift. Among the vulgar there were men who changed wives constantly, even persecuting her they had till she herself besought the Câdi for release, thus forfeiting the dowry which was justly hers. Such men might be, who thought it clever to defraud poor maidens. But that any one could think that he, Muhammad Pasha, or a child of his, could harbour such iniquity seemed barely credible. The hot tears stung his eyeballs at the thought of it.

"Just Allah!" he exclaimed within himself. "Does he suppose that we have no morality? Would he, whose native customs are as shameless as the ways of beasts, leaving females unprotected and at large, instruct us how to cherish and to guard a woman? He talks as if I were some pimp or ruffian, when I am dealing with the maid as faithfully as if she were my only child!"

In truth, before this trouble with the Consul, at the ceremony of betrothal, when he himself had prompted the bride's proxy, he had assigned to her a dowry of three thousand pounds — a sum sufficient to make Yûsuf hesitate, however angry, before he gave the order for divorce. He had, moreover, spoken to his son most gravely, pointing out the

friendless state of the young woman, and informing him that if he took her it must be for life. Yûsuf had made frantic answer in the way of lovers, comparing his fidelity to stars and blossoms. The Pasha bound him by a solemn oath always to show forbearance to his foreign wife. He then drove him forth to spend the time until the wedding in a cousin's house; where, as he had heard this afternoon from the said cousin, Yûsuf kept raving of his love — in abstract terms, for decency — till the whole selamlik was infected with the trick of sighing. Nothing could have been more honourable than his conduct. The girl was better off than ever in her life before, and knew it. He swore an oath to let the Consul know it too.

Accordingly, returning to his house that evening, he craved immediate audience of the sometime governess; and shortly entered her apartments, which, providing simply for an upper servant of his house, he had furnished in the Frankish manner to seem homelike. If he had gone to so much trouble for a stranger's comfort, was it likely he would prove a niggard towards his dear son's bride? The pig who thus traduced him must be taught.

The girl was sitting in a chair beside the window, reading an English book. It pleased him to reflect that she was highly educated. In these bad times, when Frankish lore was in demand, her instructions might secure advancement to a man like Yûsuf, who knew French already.

She laid aside her book and rose to meet him with a charming blush. He took her hand and raised it to his lips; then sank down on a chair and clasped his brow.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" he moaned, "I am so troubled. God knows my heart is sad, profoundly wounded. You are kind and generous, and you know our hearts. But those others of your nation . . . Pouf! How bitter! How fanatical! They treat me and my house as dirt. Here is the case: You honour my poor house; you are alone; you have no parents. I say to myself, 'She is an orphan; I will be her father.' I therefore do what parents do according to our customs. I provide the trousseau; I also bargain with the bridegroom's people to endow you richly.

"Let me explain what that means, since it must be quite unknown to you. With us, divorce is easy; it suffices for the man to say a little formula; but the husband must support the wife for three months afterwards, and he must pay the balance of the dowry stated in the marriage contract, or, if no portion has been paid beforehand, then the whole of it. That makes him think. And the greater the dowry, the longer will he meditate before divorcing her. Now I, your father, have talked the matter over with myself, the bridegroom's father, and have obtained for you a dowry of three thousand pounds Egyptian. This sum will be stated in the contract, signed and sealed before the judge, and my son will have to pay

it if ever he desires divorce, which God forbid! Your trousseau, with the jewels and the slaves that I am going to give you, the furniture of these rooms and more which I shall buy to supplement it — I wish your house to be the kind you are accustomed to — all this, I say, will be your absolute property, and so stipulated in the contract."

The girl had seized his hand. She pressed it to her lips and sighed:

"How good you are!"

His own emotion was no less than hers. The humiliations of that day had taxed his fortitude, and the sense of his integrity beneath aspersion was like a bubbling fount of tears in outer darkness. The warm touch of her gratitude unmanned him quite. He sobbed aloud:

"Ah, mademoiselle! God knows that I have done my best! Yet here is the Consul threatening me, and moving all the Government to watch me closely; as if I had entrapped you for some evil purpose! — as if I were the worst of criminals, intent to harm you! . . . I cannot vindicate myself. It would be too degrading. And if he thinks me such a first-class *canaille* he would not believe me. Therefore I come to beg you, mademoiselle, yourself to deign to write a little word to this good monsieur, assuring him that we are not the monsters he supposes."

The girl's face flamed. "I write at once!" she said, and rose to do so.

But the Pasha cried: "One moment, made-

moiselle!" He wiped his eyes and struggled to recover firmness. "Do not suppose that I complain! Even if the happiness of my dear son were not concerned, I would suffer more than this — much more — abominations! — to serve so beautiful and good a lady. I fear my words have saddened you. Oh, God forbid! Never, I pray you, think of it again, your letter written. You must be all happy. To-morrow you must go among our ladies. You will find there mothers, sisters, longing to embrace you. They will help you choose the stuffs for your trousseau. They speak Arabic, of which you know few words as yet, or Turkish, which is quite unknown to you. But my widowed sister speaks a little French, and Murjânah Khânum owns a young Circassian who can talk it fluently. She is a present from relations in Constantinople who have bred her from a child in every elegance. At the time of the great war with Russia, French was much the mode; even girls learnt it, and this maid of whom I speak, Gulbeyzah, talks it well. She shall be attached to you as interpreter. The wedding, if it please you, can take place next week. We will have it in the mode of Europe — nothing barbarous!"

"I love your customs!" she replied. "Let it be just as if I were a native bride."

"No, no," remarked the Pasha, with a chuckle. "There are many usual ceremonies here in Egypt which are condemned by our religion, strictly speaking. These we shall exclude, preserving only one or

two which may amuse you. My son also will modify his life to suit your foreign standards; it is only just; although the life of our own ladies is by no means terrible, as you will find. To-morrow you shall spend in the haramlik. You will find there many friends. All, all will love you and make glad your heart. And now, with your permission, mademoiselle, I shall retire. Forget not that small letter to the Consul."

Muhammad Pasha, coming from that interview, was traversing the hall of the selamlik towards his study, when a sudden clamour at the house-door startled him.

"Curse thy father! Wait, I say! Be still a minute!" cried the doorkeeper; while another voice yelled madly, "I must see the Pasha. Where is he? Let me pass, I say! The need is urgent!"

"Cut short thy life! Wait only! Are these manners? He has entered the harîm, I tell thee!"

There followed sounds as of a struggle, and before the Pasha could divine the meaning of the uproar, a youth in poor attire rushed in and fell before him, panting:

"He told me to win to thee, O my lord — to fight my way through armed hosts if necessary, to seek thee even in the secrecy of the harîm, saying that the letter which I bear would be my full excuse."

It was a poor familiar of the palace, named Ghandûr, one who from early childhood had been Yûsuf's humble shadow, a youth so simply honest in his judgments that to subtler wits they wore the

look of imbecility. But yesterday he had been here as usual, sitting in the entrance on the watch for Yûsuf. To-day he had been absent, but without disloyalty: he had been sitting in the entrance of the house where Yûsuf sojourned temporarily.

"He bade me run, and Allah witness I have done his bidding. I am thy slave, give pardon, O my lord the Pasha!"

"Salvation be upon thee, O Ghandûr. What letter, now, is this of which thou speakest? Give!"

Reassured by the kind tone, Ghandûr arose, and smiling with a flash of perfect teeth, produced a letter from his bosom, touched his forehead with it, then reverently laid it in the Pasha's outstretched hand. It ran:

"My garden of delight is in thy custody. The palpitations of my heart inform me danger shadows it. Alas! the grievous power of jealousy, which can make of a gazelle a tigress, and turn a mother's love into a sword. This is the third time I have written to thee, yet no answer. Say that thou hast taken measures to preserve my lovely blossom from envious trampling and from poisoned water. . . ."

The Pasha crumpled up the letter and stood wrapped in thought. Coming so close upon his promise to the English girl that all the women in the house would love and cherish her, the warning had a flavour of fatality. He recalled the lady Fit-

nah's frowardness. She had been punished. Who could say that she had changed her mind? And, with the Consul's evil eye upon the house, the shame of any outbreak would be doubled.

"Run to my son!" he told Ghandûr. "Assure him that a guard is kept, none safer, under Allah. Bid his soul have rest."

Having watched the youth depart, he called the eunuchs and ordered them to guard the English lady as their life. Then he proceeded to the kitchens and there gave command that every dish and drink prepared for the table of the governess should come first to him that he might taste and judge its quality. And he took good care to let the women know of this precaution.

CHAPTER VI

The women's quarters were a rambling place, with three small courtyards all on different levels, tunnels, staircases inside and out, and passages which ran in all directions. Besides the ladies Fitnah and Murjânah and their households, a widowed sister of the Pasha, and a former slave who had enjoyed his favour, kept separate state, with children and attendants. Freed slaves and poor relations, recognised go-betweens and sycophants came in and out, and slept there when they chose—a privilege extending to their offspring. Old women with a secret, knowing look edged through the corridors; untidy children sprawled upon the stairs; outside the door of each of the great ladies stood rows of coloured slippers, signifying humble callers. The place seemed always populous and full of noise. In a sense, good order reigned there; but it was the order of a township rather than a private residence, including all degrees of cleanliness, of wealth and squalor. The corps of eunuchs, ten in all, were the police.

This little world of women had its liberties. From the third hour of the day until the sunset call to prayer, the lord of the harîm was absent. If he

happened to return, it was his duty to announce the fact beforehand, allowing time for visitors to veil and slip away. The inmates had their private interests, their games and jokes. The clash of tambourines, the quick soft beat of darabukkahs made a pulse of glee. They all seemed happy and in love with life, although they hardly ever saw the sun or breathed free air; for when they drove abroad it was in shuttered carriages; and the family mausoleum, where they went for picnics, was a second palace with its own haramlik.

But what surprised the Englishwoman more than anything was the charm of majesty — the exquisite prestige — which certain of these Eastern women radiated; making her feel small. They called her "Barakah"; it was her name thenceforward, and meant a Godsend, so the courtly Pasha told her. That name increased her awkwardness at first, sounding sarcastic from the lips of queenly women.

On the morning after she had written her indignant letter to the Consul, she was awakened by soft singing. A beautiful and stately girl sat by her bed, who, seeing her at last awake, sprang up and kissed her. Murjânah Khânum, claiming Yûsuf's bride as her own guest until the wedding, had sent her slave Gulbeyzah to attend her to the bath, attire her in a robe of honour (which was shown), and then escort her to Murjânah Khânum's rooms, where Barakah was asked to breakfast and to spend the day. It was useless to resist. Gulbeyzah knew her duties,

and performed them scrupulously. By the time they left the bathhouse, Barakah arrayed in gorgeous silk, her fingers hennaed and her eyes enlarged with kohl, they were laughing friends.

Murjânah Khânum took the Englishwoman in her arms and kissed her; then sitting down beside her, subjected her to a prolonged inspection, none the less embarrassing for being tender.

"Ma sh'Allah!" she exclaimed, and added some soft words in Turkish, looking to Gulbeyzah, who translated:

"Madame says you are more beautiful than she was told. Your beauty is more excellent than the rose. Your eyes remind her of the Bosphorus. You make her think of her own country. The desire which you inspire is like home-sickness."

Barakah could only blush and hang her head — a posture which drew down fresh compliments upon her modesty.

Slaves brought in trays of fruit and set them down, retiring silently. Then an old negress came in with a brazier and made coffee, with which was served a kind of fritter smeared with honey. Then a young girl appeared with ewer and basin and fine towels, going first to Barakah, who rinsed her hands. Murjânah and Gulbeyzah, she saw afterwards, used soap and washed their teeth as well — a cause of spluttering.

Murjânah Khânum rolled a cigarette. She lounged at ease with eyes intent on Barakah, and

while she smoked, gave vent to her reflections, which Gulbeyzah rendered into French as best she could.

"It is a great distress to me not to be able to convey my loving thoughts directly to the mind of one so near. Ask the dear one if she speaks Romaic, or a little Persian. No? A pity! She is learning Arabic? In sh'Allah, she will soon acquire that tongue and Turkish too. . . .

"I fear she must feel strange and lonely in a life so different: I wish I could expound its beauty to her. Ask her whether she has read the tragedies of Sophocles, an ancient Greek. No? That surprises. I had thought them known among the Franks. Say, I have read them in the Turkish version and admired them greatly. . . . At least, she knows that, in old times, before the prophets, there were priestesses who guarded mysteries of the false gods? . . . Well, we secluded women of the East are the guardians of the mysteries of God Most High — the verities of life and death, of birth and growth and of decay — of all those things which come directly from the hand of God. These are the sense of life; though much obscured by all the surface agitation which disturbs the life of men. We, in our calm retirement, always view them. . . .

"And then, when one regards the strife of tribes, the tumults and rebellion in this world, is it not well that womanhood should be kept sacred and aloof, respected in the strife of Muslims — the ark which bears the future of the Faith? . . . Then, even as

it is, much crime is caused by love and jealousy. What would it be if women went unveiled? I say not in her land where men's blood may be more equable; but here. . . . Just Allah! Youth would be a curse. If marriageable girls were barefaced, what could preserve them from atrocious accidents? We guard their youth and train them to be lovers, child-bearers; we send forth healthy boys to serve the Faith. . . .

"Tell her that I myself, by Allah's visitation, have lost all my children; yet, thanks to El Islâm, I am not desolate. I have her Yûsuf and a score of others for delight."

Hearing these words translated by Gulbeyzah, Barakah felt abashed to insignificance. The habit of confronting the brute facts of life, which Europeans cover over, clothed this old woman in a tragic grandeur which was almost terrifying. She was relieved when other ladies came and talk grew shallow. Silks and fine linen fabrics were spread out before her. Hearing that she was required to choose among them for her trousseau, she emplored Gulbeyzah with despairing gestures to say that she resigned selection to the ladies. The answer caused relief. The ladies set to work methodically, feeling, stroking, comparing the materials in the best light, discoursing all the while like happy birds. Fitnah Khânum was less forward than the others in politeness, and kept her face averted from the gaze of Barakah. She took her leave before the service of the midday meal.

The Pasha's widowed sister begged of Barakah to spend the following day with her in her apartments. Murjânah was approached and gave consent.

"I can give you dinner on a proper table with chairs and knives and forks," the widow said in broken French.

Murjânah Khânum's tables were brass trays on little stands, and everybody ate with fingers from the dish.

The day with Leylah Khânum was less serious. The widow's talk was all of love and lovers. A perfect host of go-betweens was kept employed to find her a fresh husband; but, though ageing fast, she was fastidious and asked perfection.

"God grant she may not die a widow," sighed Gulbeyzah, who explained the case to Barakah.

Leylah Khânum was much exercised to know whether Barakah had had much love-experience in England. Hearing "No," she raised her hands in marvel. One so beautiful! The mistress of so much charm! And unveiled among men! She asked the reason.

"I was poor," said Barakah.

At that there was a loud outcry; Leylah Khânum and Gulbeyzah called on God for pity.

"But you are beautiful! Men pay for beauty, need no bribe with it. And you mean to say they would have let you die a virgin — with that loveliness? O Lord of Heaven! What a wicked waste!"

Their dread of dying in virginity appealed to

Barakah as something comical when she remembered the ideals preached in Christendom.

Leylah Khânum told her stories of true love, all far from proper judged by English taste; and shocked her by the cool assertion that poison was a woman's natural weapon. In the afternoon they were invited to Murjânah Khânum's rooms, where the business of the trousseau still proceeded. It went on for days. Each morning when she woke, the bride-elect found some fresh present from the Pasha in her room, which Gulbeyzah made her carry forth and show to every one. The whole haramlik frolicked round her in excitement.

Gulbeyzah's status in the household puzzled her. The Circassian seemed the equal of the ladies, yet was called a slave.

She said to her one day:

"You are as white as I am. How can you bear to be a slave like Wardah or Fatûmah?"

"Not like Wardah or Fatûmah, if you please!" was the superb rejoinder. "They or their fathers were captured in a warlike raid and made to Islam, I, God be praised, was born in the Faith. Look!" she cried, and with a splendid gesture bared her bosom. "This is the paste of which they make sultanas. My parents sold me — they were poor — that I might come to honour, as others of the family have done before me."

"But what chance have you here? Do you expect to captivate the Pasha?"

"God forbid! I never even see him. Here I serve the sweetest of all ladies, who will one day find me a rich husband. It is a famed harîm, and my lady is renowned for goodness and refinement. The greatest in the land would not disdain a fair Circassian girl of her instructing."

"But do you never miss your freedom? You can form no projects, being, it seems, entirely in the hands of others. Surely your thoughts are not so ruly? You must sometimes dream?"

Gulbeyzah fixed her great eyes on the questioner as though debating whether she were to be trusted. Then, with a smile, she grasped her hand and whispered, "Come!"

She led the English girl across the court where grew the orange trees, down a foul-smelling passage towards the kitchens, and up a flight of stairs into a corridor which served the chambers of the humblest servants. In its wall was a recess with a small window neither barred nor latticed. Here Gulbeyzah stopped.

The reason why that window had been left uncaged was plain, since it looked out upon blind walls and distant housetops. But one small angle of a terraced roof appeared within clear seeing range, and on that angle sat a man. When Gulbeyzah leaned her elbows on the window-sill, he sprang to his feet and made despairing gestures. She watched his antics for a moment, then drew in her head.

"It is a secret, mind!" she cautioned Barakah.

"I spent an afternoon here once, when I was sulky, and he was walking on that roof by chance. Ever since then I see him every day. He always sits there. I sign to him to climb up, but I know he cannot." She laughed scornfully. "I make romances in my mind about him. It is evident he dies of love. He has grown thinner."

"How cruel! How can you torment him so?"

"He is a man, you understand. One does not feel compassion as one would for girls. Perhaps if he could climb up here I should reward him, but, thanks to God, he cannot, poor young man!"

"But are you not ashamed to think such thoughts — you, the pupil of Murjânah Khânum? So immoral!"

"It is my fancy, there! Morality is not our business. We are strictly guarded. One gets a conscience — what you call a soul — when one has children. How droll you are! You talk just like a man. God knows I love you, and should like to be your durrah." (The word means colleague in the married state.)

Gulbeyzah flung her arms round Barakah. A sound of footsteps in the passage made them turn and peep.

"It is a eunuch!" the Circassian whispered. "He has been there all the time. He attends you like your shadow, have you noticed? How sweet to be so precious; and so respected, for he keeps his distance!"

Barakah preferred these confidences with Gulbeyzah to the endless fuss and noise about the trousseau. The hive was in commotion over the approaching marriage; angry, Gulbeyzah told her, with the Pasha for his wish to shear the festival of ancient ceremonies regarded as the woman's right. When approached upon this subject in a crowded conclave, she said that she was anxious to conform to all their customs — an answer which was hailed with cries of triumph.

Mrs. Cameron appeared one afternoon, the Consul's envoy, to ascertain that all was well with the perverted girl. She was shown to the state room, and there regaled with tea in glasses and sweet biscuits, in what was thought to be the English manner. The ladies pestered her with eager questions, persisting, despite frank denials, in regarding her as a near and dear relation of the bride. She glanced reproachfully at Barakah from time to time. "You're quite at home with them, I see," she said at parting. "It sounds unkind, but I must say I wish you weren't. It is a fall for any woman bred as you were. How can you put that kohl round your eyes? . . . Good-bye, my dear, and don't forget our compact."

The visit leaving an unpleasant, sad impression, Barakah withdrew to her own room, alleging headache. She was lying on her bed with eyes half closed, endeavouring to lay the ghost of former days, when some one entered without knocking, shut the door with care, and crept towards her. It was a strange

old woman. She sidled up with much grimacing; whispered "Yûsuf," laid her shrivelled cheek upon her hand; "Yûsuf," again, and smacked her lips delectably; "Yûsuf Bey, thy bridegroom," and made the motion of grimacing with ecstatic grins.

Barakah grew interested. She longed to see the man she was to marry and, fresh from Mrs. Cameron's reproach, was feeling reckless. She tried to question the old woman, but without result. The crone kept nodding, "Yûsuf Bey" and "Come." She had brought with her a habbarah and mouth-veil, which Barakah put on by her direction. Then they stole forth, the temptress, in high glee.

But they had not made ten steps in the hall before two eunuchs pounced on them and stared into their eyes. One beat the hag, whose screams were frightful. The other, smiling, dragged back Barakah, pushed her inside her room and locked the door.

The meaning of the whole adventure remained dark to her. Gulbeyzah, when informed of it, declared that the old woman could not have been employed by Yûsuf, who was much too honourable and obedient to his father to indulge in such low games. She ascribed the incident to machinations of the lady Fitnah, beheld a plot to lure the English girl to some lone place, there to be ravished if not slain. Barakah laughed at such wild fancies. That Yûsuf's mother did not like her much was plain to see; she had doubtless cherished other projects for her first-

born; but to impute the thought of crime to her was too absurd.

"I bring good news," Gulbeyzah said to change the subject. "The Pasha has granted us the visit to the bath with you. He has engaged the best musicians and some famous dancers, and all the maidens of good houses are to be invited. Oh, what joy!"

CHAPTER VII

The party at the bath with all its ritual was one of the ordeals which Muhammad Pasha had wished to spare the English girl. As a man he hated all the pranks that women play alone, and deemed them of necessity immodest. But the feeling roused in the harîm was too intense for him; and as Barakah, he was told, herself desired the entertainment, he could adduce no cogent reason for refusal. The place in the haramlik being ill adapted to a large assembly, he hired the finest of the public baths for the occasion. The dependants of the household clamouring for a procession through the streets, he gave them one, putting in place of Barakah a humbler bride whose nuptials would be celebrated at his cost.

About the first hour after noon, the bride of Yûsuf left the house, sped by the ululations of the whole harîm. In a carriage with the Pasha's nieces and Gulbeyzah, she was driven through the streets to the Hammam. There, at the entrance, stood two eunuchs, and in the ante-chamber many women-servants of the Pasha's house. The ladies on arrival were conducted to a second ante-room and there divested of all clothing. Each put on a pair of clogs and had her hair tied up in an embroidered kerchief. While

they were disrobing, other veiled ones entered who laughed heartily at Barakah's confusion. The procession of the humbler bride had arrived some minutes since, they were informed.

The elder of the Pasha's nieces and Gulbeyzah took each a hand of Barakah and led her on from room to room, pausing in each to get accustomed to the growing warmth. Suddenly they came upon a noisy crowd. Two shiny negresses sprang forth and singling out the bride, lifted her up and bore her to a corner of the hall beneath a tap. They flung her on her back. Seeing a razor flash, she uttered shriek on shriek the while they fell to rubbing, making her joints crack kneading her very bones with their hard fingers. With eyes half blind with soapsuds, she beheld a wreath of naked figures moving round her in a kind of dance. The wall and vaulted ceiling of the building sweated. The windows were high up and gave no light; there entered not a whiff of outer air. A pulse beat at her temples. She felt suffocated.

At last the women stopped their rubbing, and by playful slaps informed her that her turn was ended. Like a sheep from the shearing she rose up, staggering intent to flee. But she was caught again and made to sit down while her hair was plaited. Then some one — it was Gulbeyzah — grasped her hand and led her to the outer end of the great hall, where were two tanks of water gently steaming. The hall presented a strange spectacle, for it was full of naked

figures, ebon and mouse-brown, amber and snow-white. Singers, all naked, sat beside one wall, and hummed and droned and shrilled distractingly.

At a call, "The bride!" the whole crowd rushed on Barakah with ululations. Her shame became acute, an agony. Gulbeyzah led her up to one of the tanks. Some one behind administered a push, and she fell in; when some one else sprawled in upon the top of her. Her head was under water for some seconds. Spluttering, indignant, her throat choked with sobs, she found herself among a group of laughing girls, all colours, who were ducking one another as they splashed about. Gulbeyzah cried, "The butterflies! Look! Look!" and pointed to the smooth stone marge, where all the ripples in the light of smoky cressets were reflected like a thousand fluttering moths. The stir subsiding when all stopped to look, the moths united into one great butterfly, dimly perceived, whose wings beat faint and fainter as the water stilled.

"She has eaten them all! Behold, how fat she is!" cried out Gulbeyzah. "I believe she is just going to have some others. Look!" She plunged, and made fresh ripples. Laughter hailed this sally. A brown girl, lissom as a snake, sprang hard on the facetious one and promptly ducked her.

Angry, humiliated, feeling lost eternally, Barakah scrambled out to face a row of grinning, dancing hags. They and the shameless girls, the fiendish music, the sweating walls, the fumes of incense hiding

the high roof, combined to make her fancy she was underneath the earth assisting at an orgy of malignant jinn.

Some one smote her from behind. She turned round angrily. A fair-haired girl was running. She ran after her. Another struck her lightly as she ran. She turned again. A third sprang on her, pinioned both her arms and kissed her on the mouth, amid applause. Then first she realised that it was all a game; the girls were friendly. In the magnitude of her relief, her shyness vanished. She soon led the romp. It was one long dancing game of follow-my-leader, varied with moods of hide-and-seek and leap-frog. All the while the musicians kept up their wild din, the hired dancers never ceased their weird contortions.

Afterwards, when they were all rubbed down and clothed again, there was a feast of most delicious dainties in the ante-rooms, and Barakah was introduced to her late playfellows, transformed as if by magic to polite young ladies. Every one of them, she found, had brought a present for her. She chattered merrily in French, and ate and drank with appetite unknown before. Driving home in the carriage with three delicately perfumed maidens, whose soft hands caressed her, she experienced a blissful languor, like thanksgiving.

CHAPTER VIII

Meanwhile the anguish of the lady Fitnah had become unbearable. The beating she had received, which kept her silent, was only part of the injustice which prevailed against her. She alone, she had assurance, was vouchsafed clear vision of the horror of this marriage; all the rest were drugged and blinded by the creature's spells. She had heard of Frankish women, who were barren, holding men entranced for life, thus ending families; and had no doubt at all but this was one of them. A woman of volcanic passions, always righteous, for her to look on evil was to seek to slay it.

She said, "The fiend will suck my Yûsuf's life out and then vanish."

Her group of flatterers replied:

"Alas, yes! She will suck him as one sucks an orange, and go her way refreshed," giving the sad mother a distracting picture of her first-born as an empty orange-skin flung in the gutter among other refuse.

She cried, "By Allah! she shall die!"

The sycophants replied, "Yes, by thy blessed womb, she shall — an awful death," and began to meditate the form that death should take.

"But she has islamed," one objected.

"Who knows if she has really islamed?" was the answer. "Our lord the Pasha is bewitched. He has forgone in her case every ordeal that might test her faith. It is ascertained that she is barren and will drink the bridegroom's life. Woe! Woe! The end of a most noble race!"

Inspired by hatred of iniquity, fanned and encouraged by her little court, the anguished mother had made sure arrangements for the English girl's dishonour, thinking no crime to vilify so bad a thing. The scheme, alas! had been frustrated by the eunuchs; whose vigilance redoubled the poor lady's grief. What dreadful magic must reside in that foul creature to make the Pasha guard her like a pearl? to make poor Yûsuf cling to her and shun his mother? Her cronies recommended her to summon negresses, of those who have familiar intercourse with demons, and hold the mystic ceremony called a zâr — the latest novelty. But Fitnah Khânum feared the Pasha, who denounced such consolations as against religion. She was in despair. The hours flew by towards the wedding; and she, perceiving all its horror, had no power to stop it.

On the very morning of the day appointed for the final ceremonies, she received two visitors, not in her own room, but in a dirty closet used for rubbish. The first to enter was the same old woman who had lured Barakah from her chamber with the name of Yûsuf. The second, throwing off the veil, revealed

a goatish face with pointed ears beneath a foul white skull-cap. It was Abu Sumûm, the most renowned of sorcerers.

He spread out his hands and chanted:

"In the name of Allah, Er Rahmân, Er Rahîm,
Who taught the words of might to Suleymân el Hakîm,
And gave the seal of power into his hand,
Lo, here I stand,
Abu Sumum, your humble servant to command!
Would you love-potions, I can give you those
Will bring the loved one to your feet though walls oppose
And all the doors be guarded by his foes.
Or have you enemies, but name their names
And I will torture them with hellish flames.
Wouldst thou their death? I'll write a potent spell
Upon an ass's thighbone, hide it well
Beneath the threshold where they dwell.
Wouldst thou their madness? I will tie their mind
To some low creature of a restless kind,
A bird or fish, that when it moves they rage,
And when it rests their fury they assuage;
And none shall know the secret saving I,
So that for lack of remedy they die.
Abu Sumum the wily one I am,
State but your need of me and so — Salâm!"

Having concluded this doggerel, setting forth his stock-in-trade, the wizard stood with arms crossed, grinning widely.

"I have an enemy," faltered the lady, "and she is dreadful, being a ginniyeh, and no child of Adam."

"Think not to instruct me," said the warlock. "Nothing uncanny comes to Masr, but my hosts of servants who are in the air inform me instantly.

Ah, if it is the Englishwoman thou opposest, have a care, for she is full of art, having attained the secret of invisibility, of self-protection, and also of transforming people into dogs. Now, what, I ask, dost thou require of me exactly — a potion that shall make her love thee, or her madness, or a wasting illness?"

"Nothing, nothing, save her instant death," sobbed Fitnah —"the wedding is to-day — and then take all my wealth."

"By thy leave, lady," cried the wizard, much offended, "I am not him thou seekest! Send for an assassin! My business is with art and not brutality. Find out some chopper-up of wood: I am a carver!"

"But I know of no assassin! How can we women find and bring one hither? O Abu Sumûm, be generous, for Allah's love!"

"Hear the excellent lady, the very mother of kindness! Hear her, O Abu Sumûm! Behold her sufferings! Grant her petition, for the love of Allah, and our Lord reward thee!" pleaded the old woman who had brought him in.

"I know not. It is not my line of business. And yet, I bethink me, there is art in it," muttered the sorcerer, relenting visibly —"much art, for she is the most skilful witch on earth; and no one else in Masr, under Allah, could hope to overcome her — Ha! What is this?" He raised his hand to his right ear, and stood intently listening, as if to some-

thing just above him in the air. "I thank thee, O Tarshûshak! — What is this?" He turned to Fitnah with a mien of righteous anger. "My servants tells me she has islamed. Is that true? If so, why not inform me at the first? My time is wasted. If she has islamed it is a crime most heinous to assail her. May Allah —"

"Mercy! O my uncle, mercy!" Both the women flung themselves upon the wizard, stopping his mouth and dragging down his arm upraised to curse them. "Wait but a moment! Only listen! They say that she has islamed, being all bewitched. She has not gone through all the ceremonies. She refuses, and our lord the Pasha, by her spells, supports her. Whether or no, she weds to-day my first-born son, and she is barren and will keep him from all other women. Thou shalt have much wealth."

Again the sorcerer went through the process of relenting visibly. "Allah knows," he groaned, "it is a cruel task you set me. It will take three days and nights of fasting and seclusion spent in ceaseless study, to overcome her servants who are in the air. Not until they are vanquished can I mix the potion, for they would neutralise my spells and make it harmless."

"But the wedding is to-day!" wailed Fitnah, out of patience.

"What matter, since her bale is of the lingering sort, and not swift-slaying. Hear what I tell thee! If I fight for thee with demons and obtain the potion,

use it not till three whole moons have waxed and waned. Watch how thy son looks; notice his behaviour! It may be she has islamed in good faith."

"All that thou wishest, only give the potion!"

"After three days thou shalt have it, by the leave of Allah!"

The sorcerer then changed his tone for one of caution, urging, "The reward, O blessed lady! It is worth much money. And it is usual to give something in advance by way of earnest."

Fitnah untied a bundle which had lain beside her all the while, and thrust it towards him. It contained the best of all her jewels. Poor lady, all her treasures — nay, her life itself — seemed light to give to save her Yûsuf from that thirsty ghoul. The wizard's small eyes gloated on the heap.

"Woe on thee, Abu Sumûm!" cried the old woman. "Art thou not ashamed to take more than is just from so benevolent and kind a lady? Thy heart is of stone, not to be moved to bounty by her pious tears."

"Silence, woman!" With a dignified and bounteous gesture, the sorcerer pushed back the bag of trinkets, selecting for himself a single ring containing stones of value. "Allah witness, that I did but test the generosity of our good mistress. But, being poor and with some dreadful work before me — having, moreover, risked my two old ears in coming hither — I will, with thy permission, O Most Excellent, accept this trifle. That and thy gracious favour be my only payment!"

Uprising, he resumed again the woman's head-dress, and in a woman's piping voice enjoined, as he prepared to go, "Forget not to delay three months. A day too soon might cause tremendous evil."

"Three months — I will remember!" answered Fitnah dutifully; adding beneath her breath, "Three days — too long! I think thou hast a mind to fool me, O thou father of three months! Well, bring thy potion. But first we will essay some common poison without ceremony. Alas for Yûsuf did we wait three months!"

She pressed both hands to her left side as if it pained her.

CHAPTER IX

The Englishwoman had surrendered to the importunities of all the household, and submitted to be dressed entirely as an Eastern bride. Her feet and hands had been well dyed with henna overnight; her hair was intricately plaited, smeared with ointment smelling strong of ambergris and sprinkled with gold dust until it made a close and shining covering; her lips and cheeks were painted, and her eyes enlarged with kohl. Then came the putting on of splendid clothes amid a din of chatter, above which strains of music could be heard, wafted by gusts from the selamlik, where festivity had reigned for two days past. A jewelled crown completing her apparel, she was led with joy-cries to the great reception-room, and there enthroned upon the dais. The room was fairly full of visitors already, and every minute there were fresh arrivals.

Early that morning, Gulbeyzah had shown Barakah her future lodging — five rooms within the woman's portion of the house, but self-contained, and with a private door to the selamlik. She had beheld a salon hung with mirrors, full of gilded chairs and tables; and then the nuptial chamber, the bed with silken bedclothes, much too good to use, beneath a

canopy of cloth-of-gold embroidered. Four monstrous candles placed around the bed looked ceremonial, and the perfume of rare flowers reminded her of English death-rooms.

The vision of that room oppressed her now as she sat idle, feeling like a wooden image, and met the criticising stare of strangers who perfunctorily blessed her. At first Gulbeyzah stayed with her and played interpreter. Murjânah Khânum came and kissed her, praying: "May the crown upon thy brow inure thee to the burden of responsibility, may the rich robes and the throne foreshadow honour for thee; may the ordeal of long stillness teach thee patience and long-suffering with dignity. May all our blessings and our prayers to-day secure thee fruitfulness, and mayst thou live to see thy children's children flourish round thee. Our Lord preserve thee ever in His grace. Amîn."

Apart from this soft murmur of the Turkish lady, she discerned no hint of a religious feeling with regard to marriage. After an hour Gulbeyzah mingled with the throng of visitors, and Barakah was left alone to face the curiosity, the unknown talk about her. Every one of all these women used strong scent, and the smoke of divers kinds of incense dimmed the air. The bride herself was saturated with perfumery; which, however, could not drown the odour of her own new garments. This grew sickening. Her brain swam. She was stuck there like a painted doll to be appraised, inspected.

Anon the crowd was drawn away from her. She sat unnoticed. A group of female musicians had arrived, with them a well-known singer. There ensued a frightful caterwauling, as it seemed to Barakah, but the rest were charmed, to judge from their enraptured "Ah's!" and ravished gestures.

Then a brown girl, clad diaphanously, writhed a dance of lewd suggestion, ogling the bride the while maliciously. Her performance was applauded even by Murjânah Khânum. Gulbeyzah flew up to the bride and whispered: "We are in great luck! Tâhir, the greatest singer in the world, has been performing for the bridegroom's friends in the selamlik. He is coming here to sing to us, behind that screen. Look! Those are his children." A small boy and girl had stolen shyly in, and were made much of, being passed from hand to hand. Gulbeyzah ran off to convey the news to other rooms.

Another minute and dead silence fell. All watched the screen. Up leapt an eerie note, sustained till it became a terror to the ear, when all at once it broke into a shower of trills like impish laughter. This was repeated thrice, and then the singer struck a solemn and majestic measure — a religious strain, which his strange voice embroidered with all human passions in their natural tones. Barakah forgot her weariness. This singing was like nothing she had ever heard. It seemed to dignify all life with a tremendous meaning. All unawares she joined the gusty sigh which swept the whole assembly when the

last note died. There followed a quick panting melody of lover's sighs, more like a bird's song than the effort of a human voice; then came a wail of more than human anguish, and then the singing ceased quite unexpectedly. There was a storm of moans and prayers for more, but Tâhir, the great singer, had already gone.

Barakah became once more aware of stiffness, headache, and a burning mouth. She called to Hamdi, Yûsuf's little brother, one of her former pupils, to bring water to her. He ran off at once, but brought, instead of water, cloying sherbet which increased her thirst. Her eyelids were so stiffened they would hardly close; her eyeballs ached; the stiffness of the paint upon her cheeks became an iron mask. She felt pilloried, derided, miserably alone, when lo! a small soft hand touched hers confidingly. It was the singer's little daughter, who, grown tired of sweets and petting, had come to the one lonely person in the room, the quiet place. She looked up in the face of Barakah and smiled. Her brother, a still smaller child, had followed her. They both sat down without the slightest ceremony, and with their heads against her knees, their hands in hers, fell fast asleep. This little group, when it was noticed, caused much laughter and a shout: "Mabrûkah!" (lucky). The bride, a statue of endurance, paid no heed.

At last a great noise came from the selamlik. A eunuch rushed to say that the procession of the bridegroom to the mosque had just returned. At once,

a heavy veil, precluding sight, was flung on Barakah. The bride's train formed. With tapers and with garlands, amid joy-cries, she was led to her own gilded salon, and there left alone. In the same instant, so it seemed to her, the bridegroom came. Her veil was lifted. She felt like to die. She dared not raise her eyes for fear of weeping. The ritual words she had been schooled to say escaped her memory. But, as luck befell, they were unneeded.

"Grand Dieu!" cried Yûsuf Bey. "The fools — the miscreants have made you look like one of them. Your face — your hair! Ah, mon amour! Ma colombe!"

She was obliged to laugh, and the nice-looking, eager youth laughed with her. Fatigue and headache fell off from her like a garment.

On the next afternoon, when Barakah, at peace with all the world, was sitting in her gilded parlour, on the cushioned window-sill, peeping through the lattice at red masts and flags, the decorations for her wedding not yet taken down, it happened that she called for water. That cry resounded through the whole haramlik in the hours of heat, and slaves with pitchers waited always ready to obey it. The girl who answered brought a vase of amber fluid, which she proclaimed the most delicious sherbet known to woman. The lady Fitnah had herself prepared it for the bride's delight. Barakah took one sip, disliked the taste, and, only waiting for politeness till the maid had gone, poured out the rest upon a plant

of jasmine in a flower-pot which stood upon a shelf within the lattice. A little later she was very sick, and went and laid down on her bed. She was feeling better when her husband was announced.

"Yûsuf!" she cried, as he came in, "it is so curious. Madame your mother sent me up some special sherbet. I tasted it, and found it disagreeable, so I emptied all the rest upon the plant there. Then I felt so ill —"

She got no further. Yûsuf, following the direction of her gesture, had fixed his eyes upon the flower-pot. They were riveted. The plant was dead, a shrivelled, blackened object. With one despairing cry he clutched his forehead and rushed headlong from the room.

CHAPTER X

"O WRETCHED day! O death of honour! O calamity! Didst thou not swear to guard my love from danger, O my father? Yet death has reached her — poison! This house is now gehennum. Woe to all of us. O Allah, ease the sorrow of my heart. O Lord, behold me rent in twain — My wife! My mother!"

Yûsuf had burst into the room of the selamlik where his father was transacting business with the steward of his property. Regardless of the stranger's presence, he gave way to grief and rage, falling prostrate on the pavement, tearing at it with his hands, and biting at it with his teeth convulsively. The steward, a person of discretion, rose at once and asked permission to retire. The Pasha nodded, and, when he was gone, bent over his demented child, inquiring of his cause of grief with heart near broken, for he feared the worst had happened. By dint of patience he elicited the simple facts, which, when he knew them, eased his mind so greatly that he smiled and rendered fervent thanks to the Most High. The Englishwoman was not dead; the poisonous attempt had failed; the vision of an angry Consul, void of decency, transgressing with investigations every

man's intrinsic right to sole and secret jurisdiction in his own harîm, raising a scandal far more dreadful than the sad event, receded suddenly.

"Be not distressed, my son!" he urged benignly. "Praise God, as I do, that the matter is no worse. Think! a mere plant of jasmine dead in place of her thou lovest. The call is for rejoicing, not for grief. Have patience, O my soul! Control thy spirits!"

"Have patience, sayest thou?" sobbed Yûsuf. "My anguish is more terrible than flesh can bear. My mother, she who bore me, whom I love by nature, has turned my enemy, to poison her by whom alone I live. I hate the murderess of my delight, and would destroy her; but lo! she is my mother, and I can but weep. My soul is torn asunder. All the world is blackened. O Allah, take my life! O Lord, protect me!"

Muhammad Pasha was profoundly moved by this lament. He thanked God for vouchsafing him a son who, in the moment of extreme affliction, could still preserve such justice in his sentiments.

"Take comfort, O my son! Be thankful that no harm has happened," he insisted tenderly.

But Yûsuf would not be consoled. The soothing tone enraged him, seeming to make a trifle of his agony. He leaped upon his feet and cried:

"No harm! O Allah! Is it nought then, what I tell thee? Then thou hast no love for me. Thou art my father; thou didst promise to preserve her from my mother's malice. Thou seest my despair,

and yet thou smilest. O Allah, kill me now, for I am orphaned cruelly. Both my parents hate me, and deride my sufferings. I go to my mother Murjânah, who is kind and gracious. She will weep with me."

And before the older man could grasp his purpose, much less intervene, that victim of a duteous heart had fled the room. After a space of thought the Pasha followed to Murjânah Khânum's quarters, where he found the young man writhing on a bed of cushions, while his second mother wept with him and prayed.

"Listen, O Yûsuf, O my son!" began the father earnestly. "I have been thinking. Thou and thy bride shall have a house apart —"

But at his voice the young man, foaming at the mouth, sprang up from his couch with teeth and hands clenched in a final spasm, and, flinging up his hands, fell back insensible.

"Go, fetch the leech, the fit will pass, in sh'Allah. Be secret, lest tongues wag to our dishonour," said Murjânah, and the Pasha went at once to the selamlik, returning with a black slave, skilled in surgery. Yûsuf was bled. While assisting in the operation the Pasha asked Murjânah:

"What punishment is meet for her we wot of?"

"Forgiveness, for the love of Allah!" was the answer. "Upbraid her on religious grounds and then forgive her. We know her generous, impulsive nature. Thy sudden kindness will affect her more than blows. Poor soul, she must have suffered very

deeply. My slaves inform me that she saw this Englishwoman as a kind of ghoul. To-morrow, with her nature, she may wish to hug her. Remove the young folks for the present."

"I had thought of that," rejoined the Pasha. "By Allah, they shall have the garden-house towards Rôdah. To-morrow I will have the place prepared for them."

When Yûsuf Bey came back to life he wept anew, but weakly, helplessly. In that condition he was carried to his own apartments by the surgeon, with the Pasha's help, Murjânah going on before to warn the bride.

This sad procession happened to encounter a slave of Leylah Khânum's who, hearing Yûsuf's groans, ran off with screams and told her mistress he was dead. At once the whole harîm was filled with wailing. Fitnah Khânum, thunderstruck by the appalling news, defiled her face with dirt and tore her raiment. She rushed shrieking to the bridal chamber, as did every woman and child who by relationship could claim the right to enter. She knelt before the bride, who stood apart, bewildered, and besought her:

"Remove the spell, restore him, for the love of Allah. I sinned. I here confess it. Thou art much too strong for me. Thou, by thy magic, hast turned round the sword to pierce my bosom. I was impatient, I am justly punished. The wisest of mankind advised me I should wait three months. Thou

seest how I love thee, how I kneel to thee and kiss thy feet. Accept my life's devotion: only save him!"

Without seeking for an answer to her prayer, she rose distractedly and went and flung herself upon the bed where Yûsuf lay. He moaned:

"My mother! Oh, alas, thy bitterness! How couldst thou seek to rob me of delight? Behold me dead! Now art thou satisfied? O Lord have mercy on me! O Calamity!"

Blubbering loudly, she implored forgiveness. Soon his arms went round her; they lay, hugging one another, sobbing, cooing, while the spectators wept aloud in tender sympathy. The Pasha's face was hidden in his pocket-handkerchief. Murjânah Khânum murmured prayers beneath her breath.

"O my despair! my wickedness!" the mother shrieked.

"My grief, my desolation; now my joy!" sobbed Yûsuf.

"O Lord, relieve me, for my heart is bursting," moaned the Pasha.

"Oh, what do I behold. How rapture pains me!" came from bystanders. All, in the selfish orgy of emotion, forgot the terrified and wondering bride, who, understanding not a word of what was said, surveyed a riddle. She asked the Pasha what the matter was. He answered with a hiccup of emotion:

"It is nothing, mademoiselle. It will soon pass. Have no fear!" which only added to her stupefaction.

She had seen such exhibitions in ill-governed nurseries, but never among grown-up folks before. To account for all the outcry she imagined some tremendous tragedy, and waited anxiously to learn its nature.

It was close on midnight ere the chamber emptied and, left alone with Yûsuf, she could put her question. Then he told her the whole story with frequent interjection of "Oh, how I suffered!" She learnt that she had narrowly escaped a cruel death. But how her danger bore upon the scenes she had just witnessed, or in what manner they were meant to reassure her, she could not divine. Yûsuf himself bestowed no thought on her predicament, immersed in contemplation of his own emotions. Feeling alone and outcast, she wept a little ere she went to sleep.

In the morning Yûsuf had recovered his accustomed spirits. When she alluded with a shudder to him mother's wickedness, he bade her have no fear; all that was past. From that day forth his mother would be sure to cherish her. Her mind derived no comfort from that light assurance; it remained perturbed until the Pasha came with tidings of a new arrangement he had made for her and Yûsuf to sojourn in a pleasure-house of his among the suburbs.

CHAPTER XI

The pleasure-house was a two-storeyed building, much dilapidated, having been unoccupied by the proprietor for many years. The garden, originally made for pleasure by the Pasha's father, had since been used exclusively for growing vegetables. It was now like several fields with palm trees set at intervals, the whole surrounded by a high mud wall. The Pasha in one day had had the rooms cleaned out, the snakes extracted from their walls by a professional charmer; the next he sent down servants with the furniture, and the same evening Barakah arrived.

The house resembled a gigantic lantern in the blue of night with light exuding from its many lattices. Descending from the harîm carriage which had brought her, together with two women and the girl Fatûmah, her own slaves, she was met by Yûsuf, whom she had not seen all day. He introduced to her two men — a new experience, which seemed an earnest of less strict seclusion. One, who bore a torch, bowed low with eyes downcast. He was the gardener. The other — a most honest-looking youth — gazed awestruck at her shrouded form, his large brown eyes dilated to the very utmost, while a vast ecstatic smile bared all his teeth — a smile which told of infinite fidelity.

"His name," said Yûsuf, "is Ghandûr — my faithful friend. He is your water-carrier, and will be always within call in case you have some errand out of doors."

Yûsuf then walked apart with the two men, while Sawwâb, the eunuch, showed the lady her apartments. Sawwâb had come as escort to the carriage and returned with it as soon as he had seen her settled comfortably. A leering crone was left to guard propriety, a task which she performed extremely ill on that first evening; for instead of checking the high spirits of the slave-girls, who romped for joy at their release from stricter discipline, she smiled upon their antics, and herself performed a most improper dance before the bride.

For several days Yûsuf remained contented in the house and garden; while Barakah, half-dazed but happy too, beheld him as incarnate passion, not as man. She was the first to tire of loves and doves, and try to talk of something sensible. Yûsuf appeared to think the speech of every day a waste of time between them.

Then came the period of tiffs, the fretful wakening. Yûsuf began to deal in sentiment about his mother, proclaiming it a hardship that his wife should still distrust her.

"She is kind and tender — O, how dear to me! Go to her, Barakah! Kneel at her feet, embrace her hands, and she will surely pardon."

"Pardon? What, pray?" exclaimed the bride

indignantly. "It is for her to ask pardon of me whom, kindly recollect, she tried to poison."

"She is older than you; she is my mother. It behoves you to be modest and submissive towards her. I have forgiven all, and so should you. She is my mother."

It was a relief one morning when the Pasha came and bore the young man off, declaring jokingly that he would die of too much sweet if he remained immured there longer. Of Barakah he said the same, informing her that Leylah Khânum and Gulbeyzah would call that afternoon to take her out upon a round of visits.

Then Yûsuf took to being absent all day long, but came home gladly in the evenings, full of love. He volunteered no tidings of his day's amusements, and when she questioned him about them seemed to think it odd.

"All that is not your business," he informed her kindly.

She hinted at the pleasures of companionship, the bond of common interests. He laughed, inquiring:

"Are we not companions? Have we not interests in common? You teach me English, and I teach you Arabic; we compare the customs of the races. And we love! Are not these interests much greater than to hear what Fulân said to Zeyd, what Zeyd replied, and whether Hâfiz or Mahmûd obtained the Government appointment? That is the life of men, a passing of the hours till night, when they return to the beloved.

If anything of weight befell I should inform you. What pleasure could it give to you to hear repeated the gabble of a lot of people you will never know?"

Perceiving much in Yûsuf's tastes and conversation which pious English people would have thought ungodly, she gasped a little on discovering he was religious. Attracted by a faith which showed some tolerance of human failings, she was studying the rudiments of El Islâm by Yûsuf's guidance; acquiring prayers and all the rules for saying them, including washings and the proper time and place. Nothing seemed left to the believer's judgment, it was all laid down. When, at a lesson in prostration, she was moved to laughter, he became quite terrible, and warned her threateningly that in this country any man or woman was likely to be torn in pieces for a hint of blasphemy. The awe she felt was oddly mixed with fascination.

There were details she would not have chosen in her cloistered life, but on the whole it was the happiest that she had ever known. She was waited on hand and foot who had known drudgery; her husband used her as a reigning beauty who, but a few weeks since, had been esteemed uninteresting. Then there were pleasures of society. The Pasha's carriage often came, with one or other of the ladies and Gulbeyzah, to take her round to call on grand harîms. She was received with favour by great ladies. One, a princess, by name Amînah Khânum, insisted on her spending a whole day alone with her.

This dame, though elderly, still dressed to charm. Her rooms were full of European furniture, but she herself sat always on a sofa, smoking a long, old-fashioned pipe with coral mouthpiece.

"You are not of the first rank in your own country," she told Barakah to start with, bluntly; "or you would not be where you are. You do not know the people I have met in France and England, so don't pretend you do. I value frankness." It seemed she knew the English pretty thoroughly.

She spoke good French and talked of Western Europe with intelligence, seeming in general to approve its customs. One little speech of hers amazed the visitor, intruding as it did abruptly upon lighter talk:

"The Europeans have degraded love and made life banal. They spread life's agitation over a vast surface and account it progress; we value depth and stillness. Enlarging each life's pool, they make it shallow. A woman's life is of the feelings, which are dulled, not quickened, by extensive interests. Their men too suffer, growing superficial, flippant, without depth of character."

When Barakah retailed this saying to Gulbeyzah, the Circassian sighed: "She knows!" and told a curious story.

It was that years ago a European officer in the Egyptian service had wooed Amînah Khânum secretly; and she had been entirely captivated by his charms. But endeavouring to sound his char-

acter, she found him shallow. She made him islam, but his carelessness informed her that conversion meant no more for him than access to her. In the same way she perceived that what he felt for her was nothing more profound than the desire to add a Muslim lady to his list of conquests. The blow was dire, for she was then extremely lovely, and a great examiner of men, having divorced or killed ten husbands. She would not have him tell a tale among his kind, yet could not conquer her intense desire of him. What could she do? She satisfied her heart, and the next morning gave him death in easy form, being well versed in poisons.

Barakah cried out in horror; but Gulbeyzah shrugged.

"What else could woman, not a harlot, do? He was an infidel, and would have bragged of her. Ever since then Amînah Khânum has a kindness for the Franks, though she deplores their levity."

"And would you do the same?"

"One cannot tell beforehand. I am not a princess. Either that or kill myself. May God preserve us from unsanctioned love of all kinds!"

Barakah felt overwhelmed by the intenseness, the tragic vigour of these women, who seemed mild and playful.

Mrs. Cameron called at the garden-house one afternoon, and Barakah was proud to give her a real English tea. Except for the costume, which was much richer, and an added glow of happiness, the

visitor, she felt convinced, could not detect the slightest change in her. One thing at least was certain, she had not deteriorated, as Mrs. Cameron before the marriage had foretold she would. The visitor was amiable, and made no allusion to the past. Before departing she made Barakah an offer of some knitting wool and needles she had just received from England. The wife of Yûsuf Bey accepted gladly, for she began to feel the weight of idle hands.

The wools arriving an hour later, she debated what to make with them; and, being at the time in English mood, decided on a pair of slippers for her husband. But when she told him of her purpose, he frowned wonderingly, and asked:

"Are you a shoemaker?"

Utterly disconcerted by so apt a question, she tried to paint the beauty of the project, but he could not see it.

"If you want slippers, buy them in the market. It is not your trade. When one like you employs the needle, it is not for use. Ask my mother; she will show you the right work to do."

He had his own ideas. The coloured wools were given to Fatûmah, who made anklets of them, and other personal adornments, which amused her for a week.

Deducing from her wish to make him slippers that she found the hours long in his absence, Yûsuf procured her books in French and English. He

also brought her a fine musical box, which played dance-music in stentorian tones to the rapture of the slaves, who kept it going all day long. The Pasha came and begged her not to imagine that she was debarred from every pleasure. It would be cruel to confine a damsel of her breeding as strictly as a native of the country. Let her but name her wishes; they should be deferred to. He even threw out hints that she and Yûsuf might possibly see Paris in the coming summer.

Thus exhorted, and encouraged by the sight of women like Amînah Khânum, who seemed to order every one their way, she forsook the timid attitude which had been hers since marriage, and viewed existence with commanding eyes. The old woman who had been engaged to play propriety, was horrified one day to see her talking bare-faced at a window to Ghandûr, the water-carrier. The crone expostulated, coaxed, entreated, and at length, when all proved vain, informed the husband, who, to her utter consternation, laughed.

"Ghandûr?" he cried; "Ghandûr is my right foot," and immediately applied that member to the beldame's person.

The old woman did not dare to speak again to Barakah, though the latter plagued her mercilessly, crying "Ghandûr!" here and "Ghandûr!" there, for the treat of seeing her curvet and wring her hands.

One morning, after Yûsuf had departed, she grew conscious of a great oppression due to lack of outlet. The feeling had been with her vaguely for some days. Now she knew it for a craving; she must see an English person to revive her fading interest in the strange things around her.

"Ghandûr!" she cried.—He answered "Hâdir!" —"Fetch me a carriage for the fifth hour after noon."

"Hâdir!" he said again; and from her lattice she saw him speed off on his errand like the wind. There were few carriages for hire in Cairo in those days, and it was necessary to bespeak one early.

"The lady wishes to go out? Shall I accompany her?" cooed the old woman, who was hovering near.

"No. I go alone!"

"I had better accompany the lady."

"No, I tell thee!"

The lady stamped her foot, when the duenna shuffled off, wagging her head forebodingly and mumbling.

"How absurd!" thought Barakah. "Haven't Yûsuf and the Pasha told me twenty times that women, in the kind of shroud they make us wear, can go anywhere alone without attracting notice?"

When the carriage came — a hooded one — she sallied forth, correctly veiled, escorted by Ghandûr, who, seeing no one with her, asked leave to mount the box beside the driver. She gave it, feeling sure

that the old woman was watching the departure through some upper lattice. Ghandûr sprang up with a delighted grin, quite rigid with the pride of high preferment.

CHAPTER XII

In the sandy lane outside the Camerons' garden-gate some carriages already waited; a saddle-horse or two and many donkeys, all in charge of servants, twitched their ears and swished their tails in the deep shadow by the wall. Barakah felt disappointed and annoyed. It seemed that she had lighted on a great reception, when her desire had been a quiet chat with Mrs. Cameron. Prevision of Ghandûr's amazement if she gave the order to turn back, and the satisfaction which her quick return would give the mother of propriety, made her go on; but she determined to stay only a few minutes and then walk home, the evening being cool, to spend the time. With this in view, upon alighting she gave money to Ghandûr, bidding him dismiss the carriage and himself go home. He made a good deal of remonstrance, but at last submitted, understanding that the people of the house would furnish means of transit. He considered it his place, however, to remain in waiting.

Barakah then went in, much hampered by the stare of squatting servants which seemed to cling like fetters to her ankles. A Berberi butler ushered

her into the drawing-room and announced her with the single word:

"Harîm."

The room was even fuller than she had expected. Her entrance seemed to cause a great sensation. Her heart sank, there was singing in her ears; she encountered all those faces with a sense of drowning. Moving mechanically in a trance of apprehension, it was with surprise a minute later that she found herself ensconced in a deck-chair beside an open window, alive and quite uninjured, though her pulse beat high. She removed her mouth-veil then and looked about her. It seemed to be a gathering of the whole English colony, with the addition of some French and German ladies. The Consul, her aversion, was talking with some other men, who formed a standing group. He took no notice of her, rather pointedly. The women, thirty at the least, kept up a din of chatter.

The hostess came and introduced her to the ladies near her. Though the manner in which this was done was very kind, Barakah felt that Mrs. Cameron disliked her coming. That lady looked upon her as a fallen creature, to be visited and seen occasionally out of charity, no longer to be classed with English women. The prejudice stung Barakah to downright impudence. Abashment left her. She began to chatter and laugh loudly just to let her hostess know that she was somebody. Sipping her tea, she talked of harîm life, deriding the false

notions which prevailed concerning it. It was perfectly delightful, not a bit what Europeans thought. She proceeded to retail her own experiences. In a trice she gathered half a score of eager listeners.

But is not this or that the case invariably, they inquired? She was able to confute them always, with amusing instances. She sank her voice, the listening heads drew nearer; there were stifled giggles. Certain stories she had picked up from Gulbeyzah were quite killing. She told of the old woman who was set to guard her —" an Oriental Mrs. Grundy," she assured them — and her horror at her going out alone that afternoon.

" But my husband doesn't mind a bit, of course. The dear man lets me do just what I like. It is only middle-class people nowadays who are strict about seclusion. . . . Oh, by the way, do you know Princess Amînah? . . ."

She had never in her life talked so effectively. The stored frivolity of weeks was spent in one short hour; while with the tail of an eye she noted Mrs. Cameron's disgust at her small social triumph, the shrugs and glances she exchanged with her own kind.

While her success was at its height, she readjusted her white muslin mouth-veil and got up to go.

" Thank you for a most delightful hour," she gushed at taking leave, receiving in reply a look which plainly said: " You have deteriorated."

Going out upon the wave of her excitement, she suddenly remembered that she had dismissed her carriage. It was no matter. The distance to be traversed was no more than half a mile, the road a straight one, shady at that hour. The little walk would serve to cool her wits.

But Ghandûr, who was squatting by the outer door, sprang up at sight of her. He bade her "Wait!" with a profusion of engaging grins and frantic gestures. Taking her assent for granted, when she stopped to argue, he set off down the lane at a great pace, trailing a plume of dust from either heel.

Seeing she still moved on, despite her servant's warning, the doorkeeper of the house stepped forward and, saluting, begged her to return indoors. When she refused, he shrugged despairingly and with some word which sounded like an oath went back to his own seat. The waiting grooms and donkey-boys called out, and standing together in a little crowd stared after her. She thought them merely rude.

She moved against the stream of country people returning homeward from their business in the city. They stared at her in passing, and occasionally made remarks which sounded friendly. The dust raised by the trail of robes, and by the donkeys' hoofs, was some annoyance; but the dust itself became a splendour where the sunset caught it; the shadows were deep blue, enhancing colours of the

crowd; and the balm of evening was in every breath she drew. To Barakah, who had not walked for months, the very motion was a comfort. She stepped forward briskly, musing on the scene she had just quitted.

What were those women saying of her now? Mrs. Cameron was no doubt declaiming, and they all agreed with her. Every word that she had said was turned against her. On that perception she was filled with shame. The unkindness, the indecency of holding up her husband's people to provide amusement for a hostile race appeared unthinkable, the basest treachery. A wave of tenderness for Yûsuf, for Ghandûr, the slave-girls, even the old woman,— all the home surroundings,— overcame her; while her mind abhorred the frigid, callous English, who had lured her on to make a mock of her. Why should she ever see them more? She hated them. Phrases which had passed her lips ten minutes since were now abominable — a source of shame that could not cease, it seemed, but must flow on for ever till the end of time. How had she uttered them? It was their fault for scorning her, for placing her on an unnatural footing, making speech a pitfall. The harîm was her natural refuge, her true home. She never wished to quit its shade again.

Thus fiercely musing, she pursued the sandy lane until she reached a point where a road branched off from it at right angles.

Upon the corner stood a whitewashed shrine,

pink in the glow of sunset, the crescent flashing on its egg-like dome; beside it a great tree under whose foliage a crowd of men were sitting out on stools, smoking and drinking coffee in the shade. Some of these took notice of her, pointing rudely, attracting the attention of the others and the passers-by. Supposing something wrong with her attire, she quickened step. Her road ran through a village. She heard shouts and laughter. A well-dressed man strode past her from behind, and turning searched her eyes. Spurred now by fear, she tried to hurry on; but found herself the centre of a crowd, whose members, moving with her, jabbered, pointed, jeered. One tweaked her habbarah; another seized her arm as if to feel the muscle. Her heart beat loud, her throat was choked with sobs repressed by terror.

The mob grew every moment bolder in its menace. A stalwart peasant-woman barred the way before her, grinning — prepared, it seemed, to pluck away her mouth-veil.

Barakah had paused, cowering, not knowing where to turn for succour, when the shout of a familiar voice relieved the strain and let her tears have vent. Ghandûr came on the scene, leading a saddled ass. His explanations soon dispersed the mob. He lifted her upon the donkey; and in a moment, as things happen in a dream, she was at home again, confronting Yûsuf, who approached the gate as they arrived.

He seemed thunder-struck at her appearance. Hearing Ghandûr's story, he asked God for help, and raised his arm to strike her. She fell fainting at his feet.

CHAPTER XIII

When Barakah came to herself, she was lying in her bedroom, which was dim and seemed unusually lofty, for her bed was on the floor, and a feeble lamp confined in perforated brass, which gave what light there was, stood down beside it. The pattern of the brass-work, much enlarged, was faintly reproduced on wall and ceiling. She was alone, but from a distance sounds of wailing reached her, and she heard her husband cursing the old woman for neglect of duty.

When she recalled her glee at setting forth that afternoon, the course of subsequent events seemed very cruel. After such misfortunes, consolation was her due; instead of which the house was in commotion, Yûsuf mad. Self-pity overwhelmed her. She was all alone among strange savage beings without sympathy; while those who might have understood and shared her feelings were her enemies. She lay with face down on her pillow, weeping silently.

By and by Yûsuf came into the room. She could tell by his hard breathing he was still enraged. Afraid that he was going to beat her, she lay quiet, as though still unconscious; but in a little while a sob betrayed her. Then his wrath descended.

French deserting him, he raved at her in Arabic and Turkish; and her inability to catch his meaning made him angrier. She lay in terror, crying bitterly, replying to such questions as she understood, until his fury sank to lamentation and his French returned.

"My honour!" was his cry. "You have betrayed my honour in thus going forth alone. The servants of the English house who know you will send a whisper and a laugh through all the markets. And those who saw you walking in the dust! . . . Have you no shame, no delicacy? What will my father say? The news will kill him! You have killed my father!"

"You do not think of me at all," sobbed Barakah. "Here have I been insulted, scared to death by your vile people, and you scold me! I wish that I had never seen you. I am so unhappy! In England people would be punished for the things you do. Those horrible men and women who attacked me —"

"May Allah burn them, every one!" cried Yûsuf in fierce Arabic. "Gladly would I pluck out all their tongues! They witnessed the dishonour of my name, and will relate it."

The wrangle lasted far into the night. At last, however, Yûsuf's tone relented; they embraced, and he demanded the whole history of her ill-starred visit. But when he heard that men had been in the same room with her, his wrath redoubled. He beat his

breast, he gnashed his teeth, he slapped her face, he paced the room denouncing her depravity.

"You are a brute!" she cried hysterically. "What harm if men were present? They did not come near me. I am not like your women — bred up to think of one thing only. Nor are Englishmen like you; they have respect for women. You are mad."

Yûsuf was really mad, or seemed so, at that moment. He called her evil names in every tongue of which he had a smattering; and then in French, made childish by his rage, accused all Europeans of disgusting conduct.

"You deny it — *hein?* You are a liar, for the fact is known. We are not ignorant; we travel, and we have their books. What say you of their balls, their public dances, where women — nay, young virgins — choose what man they please, deserting husband or fiancé — empty names! — and dance and afterwards retire with him? The fact is known! The race is shameless — may God punish them! It is forbidden for us to cast up former things in marriage; but for the future I command you to forsake their filthiness. Go once again, and we shall know you worthless! Swear to renounce their company, or I will kill you!"

She sat up and confronted him with eyes of fire.

"Oh, brute!" she panted; "monster! rabid dog! I have had enough of you and your behaviour. I

shall leave you. To-morrow I shall go to the Consul and tell him how you struck me!"

"You shall not leave this room. I am your master."

"Lock the door, block up the window, bind me, guard me, I still will find some way to let the Consul know. You shall be punished — I have sworn it. I have had enough, I say. I shall return to England."

"Your talk is madness! Have a care! The punishment is death for one renouncing El Islâm. Say, is that your meaning? Your own slaves will kill you!"

He put the question in blood-curdling tones. But Barakah, dissolved in tears, made no rejoinder. A minute later he was once more at her side, imploring mercy, declaring her his light of life, his pearl of pearls. She still whimpered, "I shall tell the Consul."

At last she fell into a troubled sleep.

When she woke again it was broad daylight; her coffee and a kind of pancake, which composed her breakfast every morning, steamed upon a tray beside her. Yûsuf had left the room. He came back presently, and, kneeling down, implored her to forget his madness. Enjoying her advantage in a listless way, she put on an exaggerated air of feebleness, and moaned:

"You were too cruel. I shall tell the Consul."

At that he sprang up as a man demented and rushed out. No sooner was he gone than she relapsed to weeping, stricken by the curse of utter helplessness which underlay her pitiful pretence at pride. To have been beaten black and blue by Yûsuf would have been less ignominious than to let the Consul know she was unhappy. She had walked into this guarded life with open eyes, aware of the conditions which must thenceforth fetter her existence, boasting love for them. The least complaint, much more retreat, was thus impossible. Even in the heat of anger she had had no real intention to go back. Yûsuf had enraged her, the mob upon the previous day had frightened her exceedingly; but after all they were her chosen people, though so strange. She could never come to hate them as she did the English.

She rose at last with mind to go into another room. The door was locked. Upon her trying it a slave-girl shouted:

"It is forbidden to go out. Does my lady require anything that I can bring her?"

Barakah bit her lip and flushed as she turned back. Remembrance of her boasting yesterday before those Englishwomen rose to taunt her.

A little sunlight entered through the lattice like gold-dust. The gardener was at his work of watering — a lengthy process — assisted by his little son and by Ghandûr, Fatûmah playing round and teasing them. She heard their shouts and the familiar

noises marking stages of the work; and by degrees, as she sat idle, listening, a measure of contentment came to her. Her troubles were of her own making; she had tempted Providence by flouting rules she had herself accepted. Henceforth, she vowed, she would be passive, of a boldness purely speculative, like Gulbeyzah.

It was not very long before the room door opened, admitting Yûsuf and his father, both with faces of concern. Saluting, in his courtly way, the Pasha offered an unqualified apology for everything that might displease her in the customs of the country. His son had told him of the trouble which had come between them. It arose from a simple and entirely pardonable misunderstanding, as he hoped at once to demonstrate to her well-known intelligence, if she would pay him the distinguished compliment of attending for a little moment to his explanation.

With that, he crossed one leg beneath him on the sofa, a compromise between the Eastern and the Western attitude, and began:

" I told you, if you will have the goodness to remember, when first the question of a marriage with my son arose between us, that we had stricter rules for the protection of our women than prevail in Europe. I also told you that, those rules once honoured, a woman had all freedom and consideration. I did wrong, I now perceive with infinite regret, not to explain to you precisely the reason and the nature of those rules; for, see, entirely owing to

that fault of mine, you have transgressed them innocently. I should like, if you permit it, to expound their general tendency and benevolent intention."

Barakah was sore abashed. The Pasha's entrance, the intervention of so dignified a person in a childish quarrel due to her misconduct, overwhelmed her. At this point in his speech she interjected:

"Pardon! I did wrong, I know! But I had no idea . . . I wore the habbarah and mouth-veil. You had told me that a woman dressed like that was safe from insult."

"I spoke in too general a sense. It is my fault entirely. You sinned through ignorance, and Yûsuf should not have been angry — though, indeed, to our ideas your conduct was abominable."

"But what wrong did I do, beyond going out without permission? Why did the people on the road beset me? Oh, I am so miserable!"

The Pasha shrugged his shoulders with a smile to Yûsuf, as who should say:

"Observe her innocence!"

"No, no, don't cry, I beg of you!" he pleaded. "God be praised you have derived no hurt from the adventure. It is entirely owing to respect for you that I and my son are so concerned about it. Beloved daughter, women are for us so sacred — the spirit of the house, the secret fount of life — that we never even speak of them with friends for fear some light word of unseemly thought should go towards

them. Nothing must be known of them, no talk made about them, outside the world of women and our own harîm.

"Yesterday, by going out alone in an open carriage, you attracted notice all unconsciously. Your habbarah is of a rich material, your mouth-veil of the kind only worn by ladies of good houses. No such lady would have gone abroad thus unattended. The servants of your English friend would comment on the strange proceeding, and, knowing who you were, think shame of us.

"But that is the least part of what you did. That, by itself, would have been nothing. But you walked. Great God! What made you walk? That is for me inexplicable!"

"I felt the wish to walk. It was a lovely evening."

"Great God!" the Pasha gasped, with eyes upturned. "Does anybody walk for pleasure here in Egypt? The natives have a proverb: 'Better ride on beetles than walk upon rich carpets.' Well, well, there!" He shrugged as giving up a hopeless puzzle. "You walked. A lady dressed as you were had never been seen walking in this world before. More than that, you did not walk like other people. Ghandûr informs me that the rascals who beset you were all persuaded that you were a man dressed up. You say you walked for pleasure in the dust? — and in a habbarah? Astonishing!

"So, you see now. Yûsuf was not angry alto-

gether without cause. I trust you will not now esteem it necessary to see the Consul, and produce a scandal which I think would kill me."

Thoroughly disgusted with her whole behaviour, Barakah began to sob again.

"I never truly meant to go," she blurted.

"I thank you infinitely," said the Pasha grandly, again saluting as he rose to go. "You relieve me of a terrible anxiety. Our house has never known the breath of scandal. . . . But pleasure! — you assure me that you walked for pleasure?" he gasped, reverting to the former wonder. "I could understand it in a garden, round and round. But when it is a case of going anywhere — Grand Dieu!"

That was a marvel which for weeks convulsed the harîm world. The Pasha mentioned it at home. Within an hour the wondrous news was known to every woman. The English bride of Yûsuf Bey Muhammad had walked from such a house to such a crossways, all in thick dust, amid the crowd of wayfarers — for pleasure, so she said! Insanity, a love appointment with an Englishman, a touch of sunstroke, the insensibility to comfort of a woman of coarse origin, were solutions of the riddle freely offered and discussed. But the theory which found most favour for its probability was that the Englishwoman was the sport of some malignant wizard or afrît, who made her walk to show his power upon her.

Leylah Khânum and Gulbeyzah were the first to call and question her upon the strange performance. They asked her point-blank why she had walked; and when she answered, "Just for exercise," they eyed her in a way that showed they thought her mad. Then came the throng of mere acquaintances, not less curious, but infinitely too polite to ask a question; who watched for symptoms of derangement through the flow of compliments. The elderly princess, Amînah Khânum, alone showed understanding and some sympathy.

"My dear," she said, "you've set the parrots talking. Do you know that 'durrah,' which means fellow-wife, means parrot too? Bear that in mind. Their tongues! — They fail to comprehend. They think you are bewitched or mad. For me, your conduct was entirely natural. But I fancy you will give up walking here in Egypt. Were not your clothes a mass of dust beneath your habbarah? Whenever you are in a difficulty, come to me. I have some jurisdiction, and I wish you happy."

Barakah was far from happy in those days. For one thing, she had felt the bars confining her. And then a vision of the English sneering lurked ever in the background of her mind, a fount of gall. With Yûsuf she was once more upon loving terms, and any differences that arose between them came from her ill-temper. She was growing irritable. The food, too highly spiced, did not agree with her; the sanitary arrangements were disgusting; she noticed fail-

ings not observed before, particularly in the behaviour of the servants to her.

At first, on coming to that nest of love, released from the restrictions of a great harîm, her slave-girls had been lazy, but obsequious. At that time the old woman had commanded them, relieving Barakah, whose little knowledge of the language would have placed her at their mercy. But now the crone had been dismissed; the servants, with respect diminished by the quarrel they had witnessed, were grown insolent and off-hand in their service. The child Fatûmah, who had been a pet with Barakah, made rude grimaces and ran off when called.

One hot midday, feeling extremely ill, she called for water. There came no answer, though she heard them chattering. She called again and clapped her hands. Still no one came. The cruelty of such neglect incensed her. With fevered strength she rose and went to scold them. She met a slave arriving at her leisure. At the words, "Ready, O my lady!" proffered with an undisguised yawn, she sprang upon the girl and clutched her throat, exclaiming: "Bring water, dost thou hear, O daughter of a dog! Bring water quickly!"

The slave, beholding murder in the lady's eyes, made haste and ran. Another girl looked in to learn the reason of the noise. Barakah picked up an earthen jar and flung it at her head. The change was magical. In a trice five several vessels full of water were being offered to her by as many servile

creatures; while Fatûmah snuggled up to her and kissed her hand, receiving in return a box on the ear, which made her howl the praises of her dear, kind mistress.

When Barakah returned to her own room she fainted, her borrowed strength departing with her wrath. The servants, in a flutter of solicitude, put her to bed, and sent Ghandûr to fetch the master. She, knowing nothing of the flight of time, heard presently, as in a dream, the Pasha saying:

"Call a European doctor! That dog must know that she has had the best attendance!" and Yûsuf weeping uncontrollably. Then the next minute, as it seemed to her, an English voice above her muttered: "Typhoid! Bound to come, with native food." That was the last she knew.

CHAPTER XIV

Ghandûr had borne the summons to the Frankish doctor. Having delivered it, he wandered to the Pasha's house. A creature witless save for love, existing by it, the kindness shown him by the lady Barakah had raised her to the throne of Yûsuf in his mind. Her freak of walking had imparted to his sentiments that touch of pity for one too innocent to face the world which makes of service an angelic trust. He blamed himself for the adventure. When he heard that she was in disgrace and looking wan, he beat his breast. Now that she was like to die through his demerits, his grief was such as caused him actual pains.

Upon arriving at Muhammad Pasha's house, before he could divulge his woe, he was informed:

"The lady Fitnah has been asking for thee. Go indoors, and wait while they announce thee!"

He was standing in the hall, cocooned in sorrow, when a mob of children burst through the mabeyn, as the great screen which bounds the women's realm is called, and fell upon him.

"Oh, Ghandûr, where hast thou been?"—"I have a new tarbûsh."—"The bitch beneath our windows has five puppies — blind, by Allah's mercy! Come

and see!"—"My doll! Like a daughter of Adam —a bride arrayed—a virgin—almost a sin for thee to look on! Come and see!"

Half weeping as he was, Ghandûr responded; and, unaware of his preoccupation, the children led him towards the women's doorway.

"Go in as far as to the second screen—no farther!" said the eunuch there on guard.

Ghandûr was careful to obey; but his attendant imps, regarding all authority as ground for sport, banded together suddenly and dragged him on. He shook them off and drew back quickly; the eunuch came and scattered them with swishing cane; and then the children, tumbling over one another, began to fight among themselves with fearful insults.

"By my maidenhood, I swear to kill thee and devour thy liver!" screamed out a girl of eight to a small boy who pushed against her.

"I will ravish thee, abandoned one, and then eject thee on a dunghill!"

The lady Fitnah from behind the screen cried out for order, naming Hamdi, her own son, as probably the cause of tumult. The eunuch fell upon that wayward, dreamy adolescent, whom Ghandûr did his utmost to protect, for he was Yûsuf's brother; while Fitnah Khânum asked what sin she had committed to be punished with a boy so lazy and so mischievous. She cared for Hamdi, but without indulgence. Her love was made a whip-lash for his good. At last came silence, and Ghandûr poured forth his grief.

"O Lord, have mercy! Woe upon us all! O most gracious lady, rare pearl of beauty and refinement, companion of my dearest lord and brother! Behold the glory of our house is in the dust."

"By Allah, in the dust! Thou sayest truly!" scoffed the lady Fitnah. "It is of that very business that I wish to speak with thee. What is the truth about her walking in the dust, thou who wast with her? Is it true that she had been alone with Frankish men? Was no man following — didst thou look well? — when she walked off alone, rejecting thee? Was not her chin upon her shoulder, and her gaze behind her, ogling? Did I not well to rail against that marriage? Now it is clearly proven that she has no modesty."

"O my despair! O evil day! The fault is mine!" cried out Ghandûr, beside himself. "Blame not her Grace; she is the noblest lady — as innocent as is a babe; she thinks no evil. O bitter grief! O Allah! O calamity!"

"Now Allah heal thee! It is plain she has bewitched thee too. She is for all men, like the rest of her foul race — for strangers, servants, donkey-drivers, even scavengers! Pray, pray to God till I bestow on thee a charm of power!"

"Hush! Let him speak! Let Ghandûr tell his story!" cried a second voice. Ghandûr became aware of other ladies pressing to the screen. He lifted up his voice and wept.

"O lady, speak no bitterness against her. She

lies this moment at the point of death. Our house is as a tomb, a haunt of ominous owls. My lord the Pasha frowns and looks distressful; my lord Yûsuf weeps as if his heart would break. I myself have been to call a Frankish doctor, who, on reading my lord's message, rode off like the wind. Allah knows the dear one may be dead this minute!"

He buried his face in his hands, while a hubbub of concern arose behind the screen.

"O poor darling floweret! O despair!" wailed Yûsuf's mother, all her feelings turned right round. "What is her illness? Quick, describe! May Allah heal her!"

"Fever — the worst sort!"

"I go at once to her."

A sick-nurse of experience in charms and nostrums, the lady Fitnah always quickened to the scent of illness and adored the sufferer. From a creature hardly to be named by modest lips, the wife of Yûsuf was become the apple of her eye. Having sent an order for the carriage, she went through her store of medicines, discoursing wisely to the other ladies; while Ghandûr, retiring, heard from the attendant eunuch:

"Thou hast done it! We had word of this; Sawwâb was summoned. But the command was, not to tell the ladies."

He could only shrug.

Illness, like death and birth, was woman's great occasion, when, guarding the traditions, she stood

forth as priestess. The whole harîm was in a flutter of excitement.

"Gulbeyzah must come with us," pronounced Fitnah Khânum, "because our poor sick darling always loved her."

The ladies Fitnah and Murjânah, the Pasha's widowed sister and two nieces, goodly persons, together with the well-grown, plump Gulbeyzah, and a bundle of medicaments, including a whole plant of garlic and a donkey's thigh-bone, were all packed somehow into one close carriage. The sun was setting when they reached the pleasure-house. The eunuch went to herald their arrival; and all the ladies, nothing doubting of their glad reception, freed themselves from the crushed mass they formed together. They were shaking out and smoothing crumpled raiment when the messenger returned to say they were refused admittance by the doctor's orders. The ladies stood stone-still and looked at one another. Fitnah Khânum broke the silence.

"This is our son's house! May Allah slay the doctor! Come, my sisters!"

Just then Sawwâb, chief eunuch of the guard, appeared, and barred the entrance with the word "Forbidden!"

"Whose order, say?"

"The order of our lord."

"Praise to Allah! That is better than the doctor. To hear is to obey, though Allah knows that

the command is wicked and against religion. Tell thy master we shall lay a case before the Câdi."

With this menace, which afforded her some satisfaction, Fitnah Khânum turned back towards the carriage; and the work of packing those redundant bodies was performed anew.

"Heard one ever the like? To hide our dearest from us at the point of death! To keep a mother from a daughter's sick-bed — a woman from a woman! O Protector!"

The incident, when known, incensed the harîm world. The sick-room had been woman's temple from of old. To be forbidden access to the bedside of a near relation appeared an outrage, even to the calm Murjânah. The indignation of the slaves was riotous. The injured ladies received many visits of condolence, when Fitnah Khânum's lamentations were applauded as the voice of right.

"O cruelty," she sobbed. "To keep us from our darling, when she has most need of us! The Frankish doctors are all monsters, hearts of stone. It is known that they snatch dying people from their friends, to practise on them, omitting even to return the bodies afterwards. They may have skill, but many things they know not, being infidels. The pain I suffer when I think of that sweet girl — the very liver of my darling Yûsuf — lying senseless, an empty house for any demon to inhabit, and not a charm put up for her protection, is excruciating!"

It is characteristic of the harîm life, that, though the ladies were thus irritated, near rebellion, no clear word of their grievance reached the Pasha's ear. There is a wall between the woman and the man more real than the mabeyn screen which man erects. The women raise it to secure their privileges; the man, if he perceives it, cannot throw it down. His anger meets with a subservience which foils its aim as surely as loose sheets will stop a bullet. Even Murjânah, who adored the Pasha, kept the harîm secret.

Fitnah Khânum had foretold that Barakah would die, thanks to the ministrations of the Frankish doctor. When she heard that she was fast recovering, she gave praise to Allah, who had saved her life in spite of them. From wishing well to the sick woman, she had grown to love her with all the strength of her impulsive, loyal nature.

The love she bore to Yûsuf was eclipsed. His neglect of her for weeks was scarcely noticed. When at last he did appear, haggard but joyful, her "Praise to Allah" was upon his wife's account. She made him tell her every detail of the doctor's treatment, and vowed it was a miracle the girl survived it. From him she learnt the reason of the Pasha's deference to every edict of that ignoramus. The English Consul had his eye upon the house, watching to note that all was done correctly.

"Consume the Consul!" she exclaimed peremptorily.

"Our Lord consume him utterly!" said Yûsuf. "Yet for one boon I have to thank him. My father, to propitiate him, gives command that I shall visit Paris in the summer with my bride."

"Allah forbid!" his mother screamed in horror. "Our pearl of pearls to be exposed to vulgar handling, to be cast back into the mire from which she was with pains extracted! Thou wilt not suffer her to go unveiled? For shame, O Yûsuf! To let foul infidels survey thy secret joy."

"Nay, she will veil her face as the Frenchwomen use."

"Those veils are nothing, for the mouth is visible."

"Our ladies wear them in that country to avoid publicity. Be reassured, my mother; we shall guard the decencies. My father grumbles greatly at the cost, but vows that he will show the Consul we are not fanatical. We go to see the dog to-morrow, to tell him all that we have done for her."

But on the morrow Yûsuf and his father met with cruel disconcertion. The Consul welcomed them and listened to their story with politeness, but at its end he murmured blandly:

"I altogether fail to see how this concerns me, though highly honored by your visit and your confidence. The lady is, no doubt, extremely fortunate."

Muhammad Pasha, flushing hotly, licked his lips as might a panther, and glanced sidelong at his son. He offered a profusion of excuses as he rose to go.

The Consul answered, "Always charmed!" and smiled them out.

"May the All-Powerful corrupt his bones and blind him! May the All-Merciful frustrate his heart's desire!" exclaimed the Pasha as the two regained their carriage. "It seems he has deceived us, has renounced all claim. Here have I spent more than I can afford — coined money, hard to come by — what with her establishment, this doctor and the nursing, and that trip to Paris, which cannot now be dropped, for I have boasted of it; and lo! the dog cares nothing for my trouble. May his limbs rot off!"

"May Allah cut his life!" said Yûsuf savagely.

The women never heard that tale of shame.

CHAPTER XV

With the return of reason a new spirit came to Barakah. At the moment of her seizure she had been exasperated with her Eastern life. She awoke to rapture in it, to impatience of the European nurse and doctor. The smell of them, as they leaned over her, was an offence; their voices jarred so that often she would hide her head beneath the bed-clothes to shut out the sound.

On the other hand, she listened eagerly to noises out of doors — the creak of the shadûf which tipped up water on the garden, the camel-bells, the chant of passing funerals; she watched the sunlight stud with gems the inky lacework of her lattice, and eagerly inhaled the breeze which entered; and Yûsuf's daily visits were her joy. In the forest of distorted memories through which her soul had wandered friendless like a ragged child, the Europeans she encountered had reviled her; the love of Yûsuf and his people had been all her hope.

In the hunger which distressed her convalescence, the growing disaffection for a diet all of milk, her fancy pictured feasts of Eastern dishes, English cookery appearing loathsome in the memory. Strangest of all, she could now think in Arabic, of

which, before her illness, she had scarce a sentence.

As soon as she had licence to see visitors, the Pasha's harîm came in force to greet her. The lady Fitnah fell upon her in a transport of affection, and she responded with entire abandonment, thankful to have at last the love of Yûsuf's mother. The elderly princess, Amînah Khânum, and other ladies of importance, paid her visits and, as her health improved, carried her off to their own houses — not for an hour, but for whole days together. There, in the perfumed shade, she was enthroned with cushions, fanned and sprinkled, nourished delicately, and sung to sleep when she showed signs of weariness. The sense of frailty and of worth was exquisite. She was content to be the guarded pet, and let them plan; regarding them as beings of a higher race, with whom it would be vanity to try to cope. Their freedom from the sentimental mists of Europe helped this feeling, and so did their bold vision of existence, blinking nothing. The potential cruelty which lurked beneath their gentleness subdued her; the way they talked of death habitually made her feel a timid child.

Thus, with the body pampered and the mind enslaved, she studied and observed their life, completely fascinated. The world of women was, she found, a great republic, with liberties extending to the meanest slave, and something of the strength which comes of solidarity. Unless in jealous fury, no woman would inform against another, bond or free; nor fail

to help her in the hour of need. They had their shibboleths, their customs, rites, and ceremonies, even their courts of justice, independent of the world of men. Each lady owning slaves controlled them absolutely. Her husband never saw their faces, hardly knew them. The law against his making love among them, except by her command, was very drastic. The child of such a union would have been her slave. If he required a concubine, he had to buy, not steal one. So sacred with the Muslims was the married woman's right to property — a right which was not recognised at all in England. Occasionally Barakah heard talk of cruelties which chilled her blood; but her friends excused them on the ground of anger, which was for them a visitation from on high. The very victims, they assured her, never felt as she did.

One feature of the harîm life which shocked her was the equalling of black with white. The Muslim faith disowning all race prejudice, a strain of negro blood appeared in the best families; and any negro having fortune was esteemed as marriageable as the fairest Turk. Then the black slaves, though less regarded because they cost less than the white Circassians, possessed great influence, particularly in the article of superstition, which they quite controlled. Weeds from the heathen Soudan, brought to Cairo in the convoy of the slave-dealer, luxuriated in that tank of guarded ignorance; and many an enlightened Muslim would have died of horror had he

known the works of darkness countenanced by his harîm — the sacrifices to malignant beings; the veneration paid to hoary negresses for demoniacal possession; the use to which the name of God was sometimes put. To Barakah, however, in those early days, such fancies — what she heard of them — seemed merely comic. She ranked them with the women's playfulness, their funny stories. She was enamoured of their life as she conceived it, enslaved and thrilled by its unblushing candor. This was the season of her real conversion, which reached its climax on a certain morning, when she was carried in a guarded litter to the citadel to witness the departure of the yearly pilgrimage. From a place reserved for ladies on the ramparts she beheld the troops, the guilds of dervishes, defile before the Khedive's tent, and then the great procession wind away. Fanfares sounded, cannons roared, and from the multitude which hid the square and covered every roof and balcony in sight, beading with heads the very summits of the citadel, a sigh went up.

Barakah was in an ecstasy. When her eyes wearied of the flash and movement, she surveyed the vast blue sky, the coloured, sun-lit walls, the minarets where doves were circling. She pictured the long journey of the pilgrims, on the shining sea, across the burning sands, to the eternal sanctuary. What scene in Christian Europe could be matched with this? Religion, but a mummy there, here lived and moved.

Returning home, she felt a craving to unbosom, and bethought her of a girl in England, once her friend. She called for ink and pens, and wrote forthwith to Julia Long, recounting her changed fortunes, and extolling Egypt. She described the scene she had that morning witnessed, and concluded:

"Julia darling, you will think it strange, but I am sure that this religion is the true one. Here every woman has a chance to marry, and the accidents of wealth and birth are not the barriers they are at home. Polygamy is not at all what people think. The Moslems are as strict as Puritans about morality; and the women here are happier than those at home. Europe has gone all wrong, and so has Christianity. Here we believe in Jesus just as you do: we know that His religion is the true one; but St. Paul and others after him corrupted it. Do think of this, and learn about Mahometanism. I would give anything that you might find the happiness that I have found. My husband will be taking me to Paris at the end of June. Do try and join us there. We will pay all expenses.

"With true affection from your old friend

"MARY { Madame Yousouf Bey Mohamed,
c/o Mohamed Pasha Salih,
Cairo, Egypt."

This letter was read out to Yûsuf in the evening. He applauded it, and vowed she had a natural gift of eloquence. He asked for a minute description of

her friend, seeming much pleased to think that they would meet in Paris; and when Barakah had satisfied him to the best of her remembrance, chuckled:

"And you love her? Then you would not object to have her for your durrah!"

She warned him archly that she could be jealous.

Barakah called often on the lady Fitnah, who just now was in high feather, having been commissioned by Murjânah Khânum to find out a husband for the latter's slave, Gulbeyzah. At once she sent out go-betweens in all directions, threads of a gigantic web, in which she sat and waited. Flies soon came — ladies with eligible sons or husbands needing matrimony — whose claims the shrewd Egyptian sifted, smelling out the slightest fraud. Barakah was interested in these doings, naturally, seeing they concerned the welfare of her closest friend.

Murjânah Khânum wished to emancipate a charming slave and place her in a good position, at the same time seeking some remuneration for her previous outlay. She appointed Fitnah Khânum her intendant. Those were the naked facts. But the word "price" was never mentioned in discussion of the subject; it was always "dowry," of which a third part would be paid, of course, to the bride's people. Gulbeyzah was referred to as a cherished daughter of the house; her wishes were consulted with regard to each proposal; and no one was annoyed when she seemed hard to please.

"Thou art like Leylah Khânum," whispered

Barakah. "Thou wilt choose and choose away till none are left."

"By no means," was the laughing answer. "I am a young maid. Moreover, it is not the man I stickle for; it is society."

Whenever ladies whom she did not choose came to inspect her, Gulbeyzah donned a rustic air and talked to shock them. Barakah had no idea of what she meant when saying she required society, until one day she told her:

"Praise to Allah! Only think, beloved! Three Circassians, young like me, from the same district! Their lord — a Pasha of the richest — wants another like them. They are gratified. I have been recommended. They come to-day for my inspection. Thou shalt see them presently, as also a Gulbeyzah no one ever saw before. O day of milk! O wave-crest of all days!"

Barakah had been summoned by the ladies and a carriage sent for her. Gulbeyzah had waylaid her on the way to the reception-room.

"But what of the man — the husband?" she inquired.

"Splendid! Rich and generous; impartial as the prophet in division of his favours. If God wills, I shall bear him children. What more could girl require? Think — four of us, like sisters! Four pearls strung together, and inseparable! Thou wilt visit us, and we shall all four love thee dearly. O joy! Now go! I will rejoin thee presently."

The clack of tongues was heard from the reception-room. Before the door stood rows of coloured slippers. All the dependants of the household, all the go-betweens, had rallied to support the ladies on a great occasion. Hardly had Barakah concluded greetings ere the three Circassians were announced. They were all charming, and all bore, she fancied, some resemblance to Gulbeyzah in their child-like faces and huge eyes. They had pretty, deferential manners, seeming to speak by pre-arrangement and to think in concert, obedient to some rule which bound them, just like nuns. They were still amid the storm of formal compliments when Gulbeyzah entered clad in soft apparel, and paused as if in awe at finding strangers. Then, blushingly, she went and kissed their hands, going on to kiss the hands of all the ladies present. In so doing she gave Barakah a little bite, and when her tour was ended sank down humbly at her feet.

"They will unmask thee. Thou canst never keep this up for life," the Englishwoman whispered.

"By Allah! only look!" was the reply. "They too are acting. See now, the plump one: there is inward mirth."

The visitors, impressed by her demeanour, put certain questions, which she answered to the point. It appeared that she could dance and sing; spoke Turkish, Arabic, and some Armenian. At mention of French also, they raised hands and eyes, declaring her a perfect prodigy. They then addressed her in

their native dialect, when sudden smiles broke up their shy decorum. Turning to the hostesses, they asked forgiveness for employing private speech. They had but asked the dear one of her native village, and smiled to hear that it adjoined their own. They begged for leave to call again, which meant the bargain was acceptable; and then withdrew with every blessing on the house.

No sooner had they vanished than Gulbeyzah threw off her demureness and performed with energy a naughty dance which terminated in a sudden swoop to clasp Murjânah Khânum's feet. Her mistress bent and kissed her forehead tenderly; the lady Fitnah was convulsed with glee; the humbler women gave forth wedding-cries. And the cause of all this joy, the object of that motherly consideration, was a slave! In Europe, people thought of slaves as miserable. Here was a story to be told to Julia Long.

"O disappointment! Thou wilt be in Paris! Thou wilt miss my wedding!" cried Gulbeyzah suddenly. "Yûsuf Bey should take some low girl with him since he needs must go. It is sinful to expose thy worth to risks of travel."

"Have I not told him?" cried the lady Fitnah. "The world will be quite black when she is gone. A girl for whom his father paid three thousand pounds. It is absurd to fling her into boats and filthy trains."

Barakah smiled at their desire to keep her, thinking with rapture of the coming talks with Julia.

She had not then had Julia's answer to her letter. It arrived within a fortnight of the time of starting.

"... How can you write such wickedness? ... I heard that you had married a Turk, but thought of course he was converted. ... I do not envy you your riches nor your rank at such a price! ... No, I will not join you in Paris, and abet you in your infamy. I banish your most impious suggestions from my thoughts for ever. ... I am poor and shall remain so; but I have incalculable treasure. ..."

She crumpled up the closely written sheets, then flung them on the ground and stamped upon them. Yûsuf found her weeping uncontrollably, and asked the cause.

"Then their women are fanatical like ours!" he sighed when told. "Take heart, O fountain of my life! By Allah, such a friend is not worth weeping. We will none the less enjoy ourselves in Paris."

"I have no wish to go at all," sobbed Barakah.

CHAPTER XVI

Ghandûr attended Yûsuf in the train to Alexandria, and accompanied the pair on board the steamer. Kissing hands at parting he wept uncontrollably, and in that condition was propelled by sailors to the boat awaiting him. Barakah would have liked to stand and watch the harbour, which offered charming pictures in the evening glow; but Yûsuf drew her down into a stuffy cabin, where he left her, bidding her secure the door against intrusion. He told her she must take her meals down there, since there was no separate dining-room assigned to women. Directly afterwards his voice resounded in the corridor, with others talking Arabic, by which she knew that he had friends on board.

A stewardess knocked at her door, bringing her supper, which consisted of a single dish of meat and vegetables. By then the pulse of engines could be felt; there was a noise of running overhead, shouts, and the clank of chains; the ship was moving. Having made an end of eating, she retired to bed and, being tired, went to sleep immediately. The slamming of the door by Yûsuf partly roused her. She could hear him swearing, asking Allah to be put on shore, and knew that he was sea-sick; but it seemed

no matter. Next morning, as the sea was rather rough, she kept her bunk until eleven o'clock, when she got up and put on English clothes she had brought with her. Yûsuf, more dead than living, asked what for.

"I go to smell the air."

He sobbed: "With face exposed! Behold me dead, while dogs defile my grave."

Supposing his mind wandered — for she wore the English veil which he himself had said would be sufficient after leaving Egypt — she found her way on to the deck and spent an hour there, pacing up and down, enjoying the strong wind. When she returned to Yûsuf he was inarticulate. She stayed with him until the evening, when she went on deck again for a few minutes before turning in. It was five days before the gale abated.

At length one morning they awoke to ease of movement, and Yûsuf rose. His smile was tentative at first, but soon grew confident. "I could not tell thee for my sickness," he informed her, "but there are common people of our faith on board. I would not have their talk asperse my wife. It mattered less while I myself made no appearance. No doubt they took thee for some Frankish woman. But now keep close in here. Wait till we get to Fransa."

Without waiting for her answer, he went out. But in a minute he was back again, exclaiming:

"The wife of Hâfiz Bey, my friend, lies near to death! Come thou and see what can be done for her,

and God reward thee! Put on thy habbarah. My friend will guide thee."

It was the first time he had spoken of his friends to her. She followed him and was presented to a fat, good-tempered-looking youth, exceeding swarthy, clad in a European suit too tight for him, who apologized in baby French for thus "deranging" her. He opened the door of an adjacent cabin, bowed her in, and then retreated arm in arm with Yûsuf.

It was a two-berth cabin. In the lower bunk a buxom girl of eighteen years or less — a perfect blonde — lay with her eyes closed, making moan with every breath. The childish face was flushed, discoloured round the eyes with weeping; the hands clenched. Whatever her complaint, it was not sea-sickness.

"How is thy health?" the visitor asked softly.

"O Lord! I die! I perish! O fresh air! O sun!" gasped out the sufferer. "O Allah! Was I born a fish to be thus thrown upon the sea — a snake, to be imprisoned in this box?"

"Be brave! The voyage is now almost ended. In two days or three, at most, we are released. Tell me thy pains! What ails thee?"

The prostrate beauty opened great blue eyes of injured innocence and asked: "Who art thou?"

"I am the wife of Yûsuf Bey, thy husband's friend."

"The Englishwoman!" She sat up and clung to Barakah. "How canst thou bear it, thou, an hon-

oured wife! Will not thy parents take account for the indignity? Oh, end my life, I pray thee; it is unendurable!"

Slowly, by force of patience, Barakah elicited that the girl, by name Bedr-ul-Budûr, a pet slave of the mother of young Hâfiz Bey, had been presented to him for his comfort on this journey, since his bride, of high ideas, refused to travel. She had been a little frightened in the train, a new experience, but much elated till she came on board this ship and felt the sea. Then she realised that she had been beguiled, defrauded, enticed to an undignified and hideous death. Hiccuping sobs broke in upon her narrative, which ended in a storm of tears.

Barakah tried to soothe her mind with cheerful talk, depicting all the charms of life in Paris.

"Thy voice is sweetness!" she entreated. "Stay with me! Turn out my consort: let him house with thine. What does one want with men when one is dying?"

Going out on that injunction, Barakah found Hâfiz and her husband waiting close at hand. The former, greatly scared by his companion's illness, was prepared for any sacrifice to save her life; and Yûsuf raising no objection, Barakah's effects were moved into the other cabin, while Hâfiz took his baggage to the "house of Yûsuf," as he called it, jesting.

Bedr-ul-Budûr gave praise to Allah. The pres-

ence of a lady of acknowledged standing relieved her of the sense of singular and base ill-treatment, which was all her illness.

At length the ship stood still and filled with voices. It was night. The men called from the corridor to warn them that the landing would take place at the third hour next morning. Thus bidden, they took out their Frankish garments and compared them.

Barakah's were old, of sober hue. Bedr-ul-Budûr's brand-new and something garish. They slept but little, talking through the night.

When Barakah had finished dressing in the early morning, her companion, waking, screamed with horror at the English veil.

"Merciful Allah! It is dreadful. It hides nothing. It is what the wantons wear. Wait but a minute! I have more than one. I will provide thee. My kind princess advised me what was right to wear."

Tumbling out of her berth, Bedr-ul-Budûr found in her box a fold of thick white gauze, which she proceeded to throw round the face of Barakah, attaching it to the bonnet with two little brooches.

"By Allah, that is better!" she remarked, and then gave all her mind to her own dressing.

When this was finished, her appearance smote the eye. Her bonnet was sky-blue, the thick white veil depending from it like a curtain, her dress a lively pink, her stockings white, her boots and gloves bright

yellow, shining in their newness; she had a pale blue parasol adorned with frills of lace.

"The Franks wear many colours," she remarked to Barakah, adding with childish wonder, "Why are yours so dull? . . . By Allah, I feel naked in the middle."

So did Barakah. To one accustomed to go shrouded, a dress which emphasised the hips and bust seemed vile at first.

Yûsuf and Hâfiz fetched them up on deck, where they found two more ladies garishly arrayed, and two more men in French-made suits and fezes.

After the introduction all stood awkwardly, gaping like children who have lost remembrance of their part. Barakah, to ease the strain, remarked to Hâfiz Bey upon the beauty of the morning, the bustle of the harbour of Marseilles; but his response was marred by evident embarrassment; his eyes kept veering round to look at Yûsuf, whom he soon rejoined. The ladies formed a group apart, in titters at each other's odd appearance. Presently a man, clad as a Frank, approached with Arab greetings. He kissed the hand of Hâfiz Bey, who welcomed him. It seemed he had been warned by letter to prepare the way for them.

"All is ready, lords of bounty!" he exclaimed. "Deign but to follow me, the ladies with you."

The drive along the quays through noisy streets to the hotel, the breakfast which their guide assured them had been cooked and chosen in accordance with

religious law, were trammelled by constraint, and went off sadly. Only in the train, where they were separated, each sex enjoying a reserved compartment, did conversation flow. Among the women it was soon uproarious. They talked and laughed half through the night, appealing constantly to Barakah, a European born, for information. The appearance of the men at every station, to ascertain that they were well, produced a hush; but no sooner were the despots gone again than the mad talk and laughter raged anew.

At length they tired and tried to rest. They cursed the narrowness of the divans, the work of devils. When morning came, Bedr-ul-Budûr was at the point of death once more, asking her Maker what she had done to earn such disrespectful treatment; while Barakah, beside the window, looking out at Christian villages, was haunted by remembrance and grew sad.

The sun had long been up when they reached Paris. Yûsuf and Hâfiz, Bedr-ul-Budûr and Barakah, packed in one cab, were driven with a rattle through tumultuous streets to the hotel where rooms had been engaged for them. The hostess, a stout woman elegantly dressed in black, and the entire staff stood out to welcome them. The woman bowed incessantly, adressing Yûsuf and his friend as "Monseigneur." Finding that Barakah knew French she drew to her and poured a smooth flow of amenities into her ear.

"Madame has only to command — all that she desires. The nobility of the Orient are our most valued clients. Should madame require conversation, I am always at her service. The princes come to Paris for diversion, that is understood. Young men so rich! They must amuse themselves! But then their ladies must not find the life too sad."

Thus prattling, she conducted them upstairs and flung open a door, exclaiming: "Voilà!" Crossing the landing to another door, she flung that open also. "Voilà!" she cried again. Bedr-ul-Budûr, so tired that she could hardly drag her feet up, chose the left-hand room, which happened to be nearest. Yûsuf and Barakah proceeded to the other. Both parties ordered coffee and some light refreshment, and after breakfasting went straight to bed. They rested until evening, when the men went out to find their friends, whose lodging was close by. They returned with sundry purchases, hats, gloves, and scarves, which they declared they needed for complete disguise.

On the next morning the whole party, in two carriages, went out to smell the air and view the city. It was a cloudless day and the streets sparkled, the trees along the boulevards were like fat green posies. They were feeling happy when, in an important thoroughfare, they discovered people pointing at them, drivers shouting. Yûsuf and his seat companion Hâfiz grew uncomfortable. Cries of amaze-

ment reached them from the other carriage. Their cabman turned round with a grin and told them:

"'Place aux dames,' messieurs! — That is what they cry. These ladies are not slaves with us, que diable!"

The two men had been lounging in the roomy seat which faced the horse. They at once resigned it, addressing bows and smiles of deference to the angry multitude; and called out to their friends to do the like. But the incident destroyed their pleasure in the drive; nor were the ladies happy in the seat of honour, a gazing-stock for infidels who might possess the evil eye.

"Saw one ever such fanaticism?" groaned Yûsuf. "And they call this country free — a place where every one does what he likes!"

That afternoon was spent in the hotel in a strange manner; Barakah, at the demand of Yûsuf, instructing the four men in foreign customs. They posed and pirouetted in her salon, rehearsing bows, the flourish of a hat, the proper compliments; while the three girls looked on with saucer eyes. After dinner they again appeared before her, this time without their fezes, wearing hats which gave to them a very villainous and sleek appearance. Required to criticise their dress and bearing from a Frankish standpoint, she suggested some improvements which were hailed with gratitude. Yûsuf returned home after midnight, tired but garrulous. It seemed that they had lighted on a charming Frenchman, who under-

took to show them all the sights. Next day the men rose late and then went out together, leaving the women to their own devices; returned to dinner, then went off again, remaining out this time till nearly morning.

The programme did not vary on succeeding days. The girls, deserted, clung to Barakah. They wailed and prayed to God, and dreamed of Cairo. At length one of them — it was Bedr-ul-Budûr — took courage to reproach her lord; when all four men were stricken with amazement. They had thought the ladies would be gay indoors without them, as they were at home. To cheer them up, a trip to Versailles was arranged. It passed off gaily, with less shyness than usually appeared when they all mixed together. As they strolled about the park, a youth named Izz-ud-dîn made up to Barakah, and with the greatest diffidence implored her to confide to him the secret how to win the love of Frankish ladies. When she smilingly assured him there was none, he cried:

"O Lord of Heaven! Then thou wilt not tell it. They are so easy to their own men, as we know from books; to us so difficult. It cannot be fanaticism, since we seem as Franks."

"But what need hast thou of women, with a pearl of beauty here beside thee?" questioned Barakah.

"One who has beheld thy loveliness must evermore desire the like of it! Oh, that thou hadst a sister for me!" he made answer glibly.

He moved away, but presently another came and

made the same preposterous request, retreating with the same forced compliment; and on the journey home, when Yûsuf closed his eyes and seemed to sleep, Hâfiz Bey, whom she had thought more sensible, approached her in his turn. When she denied all knowledge of the matter he answered in low tones:

"There is a secret, that is known, by Allah. Thou hast it, and hast given hints to Yûsuf; else why should he be more successful than the rest of us?"

"Because he is better looking," it was on the tip of her tongue to say, as she surveyed the fat, good-tempered face of Hâfiz with its Chinese eyes. It was all that she could do to keep from screams of laughter.

"It is my dream," he whispered. "By Allah it disturbs my nights with cruel pain — to take a lady just like thee in all respects — a Frank and noble, of extreme refinement — back with me to Masr."

She derided him. He still continued pleading, supporting his petition with the grossest flattery, till they reached home, when Yûsuf suddenly sprang up and glowered at Hâfiz. He had been feigning sleep. It was a thunderbolt. Bedr-ul-Budûr screamed warning to her lord, who gave but a single look and fled indoors, the jealous one pursuing like a madman. In the hall the harmless youth was overtaken and turned round to plead. With a howl of "Dog!" Yûsuf sprang at his throat and bore him to the

ground. Like dogs in very truth they fought till parted by the hotel servants with the help of broomsticks; while Barakah strove in vain to make her explanation heard; Bedr-ul-Budûr appealed to Allah and the prophet; and the landlady from the third step of the stairs, with hands and eyes thrown up, exclaimed repeatedly:

"O ciel! C'est monseigneur!"

CHAPTER XVII

Half an hour later Yûsuf and Hâfiz were in each other's arms, sighing gustily and rocking to and fro in the ecstasy of reconciliation. Barakah had explained things to her husband in the interim, taking him to task severely for his savage conduct. To be thought uncivilised had always been his dread, and just then, with red eyes and all dishevelled, a-quiver from the fray, he stood convicted. With repentant tears he ran to ask forgiveness of his late antagonist.

It was decided that they twain, with their respective consorts, should spend the evening quietly in Yûsuf's room; in pursuance of which resolution they had supped together, and Bedr-ul-Budûr, who owned a lute, was going to sing, when a card was brought to Hâfiz by the chamber-maid. He frowned and clenched his teeth as he examined it.

"It is the Prince, my uncle!" he exclaimed. "He has been told our whereabouts; it must be by my father, since we have been careful not to call on any of the Turks in Paris. O Calamity! My uncle is correct and cold, a madman who condemns all pleasure."

With haste he sent his concubine into her own apartment, while Yûsuf hustled Barakah into the

dressing-room and locked the door. No would-be Franks received the exiled Prince, but a pair of ceremonious Orientals, with fezes carried at the most respectful angle, who strove with one another to be first to kiss his hand.

The Prince was a tremendous talker. A scion of the ruling house of Egypt, enduring banishment for his political opinions, he began upon the state of that unhappy country for which he saw no hope save in a European form of government. He wished the young men to attend the meeting of his club, "the Friends of Progress," at a café on the Boulevard des Italiens; and the young men swore to do so on the first evening they could spare from the study of French thought and institutions which at present took up every minute of their time.

From national affairs the Prince passed on to household matters, advocating education for all women and promotion to an equal rank with men. At this his nephew cried:

"We think as you do, having each a lady whom we treat precisely in the Frankish manner. Yûsuf here present has espoused a noble Englishwoman, who instructs us. Introduce her, Yûsuf, since my uncle shares our views."

Barakah expected her release, which she had long desired, for the Prince's voice was wonderfully sweet and winning, and she burned with curiosity to see his face. But the talk sheered off from her. The Prince, resenting the intrusion of a concrete instance

on ideas, rebuked the young man sternly, causing both to cringe.

"You mistake my meaning," he informed them. "God forbid that I should wish our ladies to resemble closely those of Europe. If you desire that, you are very foolish. The harîm life, or something like it, is the best for women. It only needs reform and elevation. It is a system founded on the laws of God expressed in nature, whereas the European way of treating women has no sanction. The latter seems entirely meretricious when one sees how ladies here make sport of marriage and shun motherhood — how children flout and override their parents. If the understanding of our women were improved, their status raised, I think our way would be acknowledged better by impartial judges. No, all that I would borrow from the Franks would be a weapon. They excel us in mechanical contrivances, in practical education, and in method. These gifts I covet, for with equal weapons we should be their masters; our Faith exceeding any motive power which they possess."

He went on talking in this strain till nearly midnight, when he left abruptly. Barakah was then let out of the dark prison. Alone with Yûsuf, she inquired his real opinion of the Prince's views, which seemed to her inspiring.

"Like pitch! Like dung!" he answered in the vulgar speech of Egypt. "The production of ideas is an amusing pastime. It is strange, the things

a man can think of if he applies his mind to it. And when a Prince is speaking one admires, of course; though this one is a madman who has lost a fine position and will lose his life merely for love of argument. What we are and do belongs to Allah. No thinking or wild talk affects it, praise to Him!"

He seemed glad to change the subject. Putting his arm round Barakah, he begged her in seductive tones to confide to him the secret about Frankish women.

"It is not for myself I ask," he whispered fondly; "but Hâfiz, Izz-un-dîn, and Saïd die to know. Where are these balls at which distinguished women fling aside all shame? We have been to dances, but the women there are base and ribald, showing none of that refinement in depravity which charms the mind in writings of this country."

In vain did she assure him that good Frankish women were every whit as moral as good Orientals.

"We have their books for testimony," was his answer. And again he told her: "It is for my friends I plead. I myself, as is well known, desire thee only."

The women were left more and more alone, the private explorations of their lords bereaving them by day as well as night. Barakah did her best to entertain them. Together with the landlady she planned excursions, and took them to the ateliers where modes are created. But the sense of desolation dogged them everywhere. Scenes which they

might have viewed with pleasure had their lords been faithful, encounters which might then have given them a thrill of mischief, appeared heartrending in their luckless state. The very gaiety of the Parisian streets seemed gruesome. If a man in passing touched them they were seized with trembling, and once or twice came very near to fainting from pure shame; and their terror was intense at passing unknown doorways, though the landlady assured them there was not the slightest danger.

Their haunting fear was lest male unbelievers should abduct them; still more, perhaps, lest they should come to wish for such a fate — the most appalling that could be imagined for a Muslim woman. Bedr-ul-Budûr declared she knew a girl who, married to an infidel, brought forth black beetles —" not one, but thousands! millions! "— she related graphically — which at length devoured her. Such stories were received with acclamation, as justifying the extreme abhorrence which they felt for Frenchmen. And Barakah, though she tried to reason with them, shared their feelings in some measure, dismayed by the vulgarity of Western life. When, added to all this, it rained for five days in succession, her friends resigned their cause to God and ceased to worry, while she herself grew thoroughly despondent.

The girls shrugged shoulders at the sinful folly of their owners, now too far gone in dissipation to endure reproaches.

" It is a malady, a madness," said Bedr-ul-Budûr,

with resignation. "It is the air of infidelity in this accursed city. We did wrong to travel unprovided with the antidote, which must be known to sages and obtainable. It is bad enough for us, but what of Barakah — a chief wife, a great lady? How can she endure it?"

Barakah did at last think fit to make a protest. One night and early morning she sat up for Yûsuf, and her reproaches met with a success which startled her. He wept aloud and flung himself upon the floor. His face was ghastly. When questioned, he confessed that he had sinned most foully, having that night consumed so much abomination that on his way home he had been struck down by God with awful sickness and had nearly died. He swore that none but devils lived in Paris, and implored her to transport him back to Egypt.

A picture seen the previous morning in a shop upon the boulevard had roused in Barakah the wish to visit Switzerland. She longed to walk by forest streams, beneath great mountains, in solitude, with keen, cool breezes to restore her spirits.

"Paris is not the whole of Europe," she informed him gently. "There are scenes of famous beauty which we ought to visit. Take me to Switzerland!"

"At once!" he cried. "This very day now dawning! By Allah, I would go to Gebel Câf with thee alone to get away from Paris."

She bade him tell his friends to treat their women better, which he swore to do; and directly after

breakfast took him out, while his resolve was eager, to obtain money from the bank where he had credit, and buy tickets to Geneva, the first name occurring to her. She was glad that she had taken the precaution when, later in the day, she saw his purpose weaken. The tickets actually bought alone sustained it, for he had the Oriental's shrewd regard for money's worth. That night they spent in the train, both cherishing sensations of deliverance, though those of Barakah were chequered by the vision of three weeping girls, who at the moment of departure had embraced her knees and tried to hold her.

Their Alpine tour, however, was of short duration. Yûsuf was contented in Geneva, giving praise to Allah for the vast supply of drinking water. But when, at her suggestion, they moved on to Chamounix, his feeling changed. His face went green as on that night in Paris. His nostrils and his eyes distended to their utmost, reminding the observer of a frightened horse. The sight of the great mountains closing in and hanging over him oppressed his soul with terror which was not diminished by the occurrence in the hour of their arrival of a dreadful thunderstorm. When he saw the numbers of the visitors he gasped and questioned: "Come these here for pleasure? Is it possible? A place so frightful, so appalling, like Gehennum! If one came with a large company, with music and loud songs that never ceased, and kept his eyes shut all the time, it might be bearable; supposing one were forced to

do it, for some crime. . . . For pleasure, sayest thou? What pleasure can they find?"

"They walk and climb the mountains. They love Nature. And the air is excellent."

"By Allah, wild beasts! Human beings are more sensitive. How can they love Nature who approve her in most horrid mood? It is evident that God Most High designed such scenes for a warning and a menace, to be shunned. Yet these applaud. They are utterly devoid of feeling. May Our Lord destroy them!"

A prey to panic, he no longer heard her arguments. His one desire was to rejoin his friends as soon as might be, to see once more the visage of a true believer; and two days later they were back in Paris.

Barakah's return was hailed with rapture by the hapless girls, who had not ventured out of doors during her absence. Things, they declared, were even worse than ere she left, their men more shameless. Yûsuf had sworn beforehand to discountenance their ill-behaviour, and for the first two days he kept his word; though Hâfiz and the others begged her to release him from it, protesting that their occupations were most innocent. Indeed, their childlike zest in evil-doing so resembled innocence that she felt cruel when refusing, as if denying babies some small pleasure. But on the third day Yûsuf came to her, with worried frown, and said:

"Hâfiz and the rest, I fear, are going much too far. I feel responsible for them, since we are all one

party. They do not tell me all their pranks. I have been thinking. It is my duty to be with them and restrain their conduct."

"Do what thou judgest right and God preserve thee!" answered Barakah, with a point of irony which he did not perceive.

"My conscience is relieved," he cried. "I thank thee. God knows how it has troubled me since our return."

That evening he departed with his friends, leaving Barakah to hear the lamentations of the girls.

"They are all bewitched," cried Bedr. "Hâfiz is by nature pious. Even now he names the Name of Allah when he opens any door and curses the religion of the infidels when passing by their idols in the streets and squares. Our Lord preserve his life! Each night I see him dead in some disgraceful haunt, his house dishonoured. Oh that I knew a good magician, a true believer, in this land of mangy dogs!"

Their fears, against her will, infected Barakah; during the long night-watches they became a sickness, and when day broke again they seemed confirmed. Yûsuf had not returned. She went to Bedr-ul-Budûr and found her in the same anxiety. They sat together, wondering what to do. Grey light at the window, raindrops coursing down the panes, made anguish visible.

At length, when eight o'clock had struck, there came a note for Barakah. It was in French, and

from the exiled Prince, the revolutionary. It bade her have no fear; her husband would be with her in an hour, when the writer hoped, with her permission, to present his compliments in person and explain the case. The other girls had come by that time from their lodgings to get strength from Barakah. Conjecture ravened round the simple statement in the letter. At ten o'clock the Prince sent up his card; the three girls fled across the passage just in time to avoid encountering the visitor, who led into the room the errant youths. The Prince, a lean, ascetic-looking man, with boyish eyes, bowed low to Barakah.

"Madame," he opened, with a flourish of his hand towards the group of reprobates, "I ask you to remember of your husband, and also beg you to remind the fair companions of my nephew and these other gentlemen, that they are young, these boys, and therefore capable of progress. It is a proof that they possess some germ of sense, which later may develop into mind, that, being terrified at last, they sent to me. I found them in a most equivocal position — in fact, dear madame, at the Conciergerie. Thanks to my relations with important people in this city, I had no difficulty in procuring their release, since they were not precisely guilty, only imbecile. I am glad to have been able to assist them, for the love I bear their parents and our common Faith. But they will allow me to remark that vicious boys should travel only with a tutor, who should have a

whip. It disgusts me even to conceive that any man could be so foolish as to quit the side of one so lovely and so virtuous as you, madame, to follow beastliness. Dear madame, your servant!"

He retired; when Yûsuf and the others pressed round Barakah, a group of penitent and frightened children. Hâfiz, the fat, knelt down before her, tears coursing down his cheeks; Saïd kissed her raiment; Yûsuf pleaded in her ear. They had done wrong, they owned, though nothing very dreadful. Some elegant ladies had admitted them to their society; they were sitting in a café communing in all refinement, when horrible low men arrived and claimed those ladies. One threw a glass at Saïd and cut his face — the wound was shown — on which there was a scuffle; gendarmes came and, siding with their co-religionists, conveyed the righteous Muslims straight to prison.

"Where we should have stayed for ever, had not Hâfiz thought of calling in his uncle," blubbered Izz-ud-dîn; "simply for being Muslims, they are so fanatical."

All four were bent upon return to Egypt, since Paris had become a place of terror. The rapture of the girls was indescribable. They danced and clapped their hands, embraced each other, laughed, cried, and gave way to all kinds of folly. Bedr-ul-Budûr made vows to divers saints, and held delighted conversations with her mother long since dead.

Four days later they were all on board a steamer,

quitting France. The sea was smooth; the ladies stayed on deck. There was no longer any question of confining them in stuffy cabins; experience of Frankish manners had done that much good.

Yûsuf turned round from cursing the fair country they were leaving, to look ahead across the vast expanse of sparkling sea.

"O land of Egypt! Blessed one!" he sighed. "Most beautiful of all that see the sun! In thee are no hideous and shocking mountains, no cataracts, no chasms, no ferocious beasts or savage people such as appal the traveller in other lands. All is flat and smooth and debonair in thee; and if thou housest infidels they dare not bite. Thy Nile is smooth and good to drink, not putrid and for ever kicking like the sea. May Allah bring us to thy shores in safety and never let us leave them any more, but live in honour, eating, drinking, fasting in due season, praising God, doing good deeds, and getting many children!"

At this conclusion there was laughter and applause.

"Amîn!" cried Hâfiz. "By Allah, it is true. The air of lands of infidelity breeds madness. Hail, O Egypt!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"A RARE place, by Allah! — full to the brim of education and refinement. It is there that one acquires the latest mode and learns to view all creatures with fastidious eyes. In Paris people would be angered at the ignorance which prevails even among our greatest learned men. Thou too shouldst go to Paris, O my dear!"

Thus Hâfiz Bey at Alexandria, to a relative who came on board to welcome him. Barakah was much amused to overhear him, as also Yûsuf vaunting Paris to Ghandûr; who, weeping all the time and sighing "Praise to Allah!" heard not a word of what his lord was pleased to say. Great was the joy of seeing Egypt once again. Even for the girls, it wiped out all unpleasantness, making a plaintive tone impossible.

Shrouded once more in habbarah and face-veil, they stood and watched the crowd of buildings faint with sunshine, seeming diaphanous between the sapphire sky and the blue sea that looked opaque as lapis lazuli. A gaily coloured people thronged the quays and crossed the harbour in innumerable little boats. A din as rousing as a clarion call, composed of many simple noises, filled the sunlight. The girls, exhila-

rated, danced on tiptoe as they waited for the word to go ashore. They chattered like small birds, inconsequently, and every minute interjected "Praise to Allah!" Baraḳah inclined to silence, though she shared their rapture.

The face-veil, which she had not worn for many weeks, seemed strange at first. It gave the sense of prying and slight mischief one has in peeping over a forbidding wall. Her eyes above it seemed more penetrating. She turned them from the crowd on shore to follow Yûsuf's movements. He was now himself again, correct and dignified, commanding as of right, entirely rehabilitated in her good opinion. It seemed to her that the contempt she had so lately felt for him was undeserved. Sinking in a strange element, he had lost his head and for a moment clung to her. The case had been her own at first in Egypt. A minute previous she had said good-bye to Hâfiz, Izz-ud-dîn, and Saïd. It was curious to know that though they would be dwelling near her in the city, meeting Yûsuf daily, she would very likely never see them in this world again. But the prospect did not sadden her at all. Shade and seclusion seemed just then the highest good.

Having spoken their polite farewells, Yûsuf and his companions took no further notice of the group of veiled ones. Ghandûr had been deputed to look after them. He ushered them on shore, and sat beside the driver of the carriage which conveyed them to the railway station, praising Allah all the while

and weeping tears of joy. In Barakah's absence, he declared repeatedly, there had been no breeze in Egypt nor any spot of shade for man's repose. He found them their reserved compartment in the train, and supplied their many needs, procuring sweets, chickpease, pistachio nuts, and hard-boiled eggs from venders on the platform, as well as two large porous jars of drinking-water. The girls asked Allah to take note how good he was, and called him brother.

The dazzle and intoxication of great light remained with them even when the door was shut and they were in warm shade. The sunlight here was not like that of Paris, a thing to stare at, but a blinding glory. It danced in flakes of all the colours of the rainbow, making the buildings and the people pale and ghostlike. The very heat which soon reigned in their moving box, the very dust which drifted through its shutters, were welcome, being heat and dust of Egypt; and at the stations, when familiar cries were heard, the speech of true believers built upon the name of Allah, the girls could not contain their sentiments, but bounced upon the seats and shrieked for joy.

"Hear what I am going to do, by Allah's leave," cried Bedr. "Immediately on my arrival at the palace, before seeing any one, I shall go to the hammâm and make our old bellânah scrub and knead me till every vestige of the dust of Paris is abolished. Then she shall dye my hands and feet with henna

and shall kohl my eyes and eyebrows,— if we had not been forbidden to take kohl to Paris, our men would not have left us as they did,— and then I shall stretch myself like a sleek cat and looking at my pretty hennaed toes, shall say, 'I seek refuge in Allah from the abomination of the infidels.' That done, and being dressed in my most splendid robes, I shall present myself before my ladies, and shall lie to them; declaring that I was most happy there in Paris, that Hâfiz Bey refused to leave me for a single instant. The ladies will not doubt me, seeing my great beauty, and Hâfiz Bey, you may be sure, will not deny my story. Thus shall I gain more favour in his eyes, and make his wife — the proud one! — wish that she had gone instead of me. What say you?"

"By Allah, we will do the same in all respects!" her companions cried delightedly. "But what of Barakah? Promise, O Barakah, to hide the truth from the harîm!"

Barakah promised; when they made her swear to love them always, though they were but slave-girls and she a dignified and noble lady, for the sake of the misfortunes they had borne together. They all clung round her when the train reached Cairo. The door of their compartment was flung open by Sawwâb in person, grinning welcome, with other eunuchs close behind him on the platform.

Sawwâb conducted Barakah with honour to the harîm carriage, entering which she was hugged

breathless by the lady Fitnah, while Leylah Khânum and her daughters started chattering, telling her all the news at once and in a single breath.

Gulbeyzah had been married a whole month. She was absent in the country with her lord's whole house, but would return, it was expected, in a week or two. Had Barakah heard in Europe — no doubt she had — that the Sea Canal was to be opened in the coming year, with great festivities? — the King and Queen of France were coming, it was rumoured. Murjânah Khânum had been far from well. That was why she had not come to welcome Barakah, to whom she sent her warmest salutations. Barakah was not going to the garden-house this time, but to the Pasha's palace, to remain with them, the praise to Allah! Fitnah herself had seen the rooms cleaned out and perfumed. One of the blacks, Zamurrudah, was dead, the Lord have mercy on her! The old striped cat had kittens, lucky one! The Pasha's nieces were quite positive about the fact, though no one had been able to find out their hiding-place.

As Barakah, caressed by all of them, received this outpour, her feeling of home-coming was complete. And when she came to her own gilded salon — the same where she had sipped the poison which seemed now a dream — there was a slave-girl of Murjânah Khânum's waiting to conduct her to the bath, with a present of rare flowers and fruit, and a

robe of honour which she was to don, when she had rested, for supper in Murjânah Khânum's rooms where all the ladies were invited to meet her.

The ladies, having voided their own news, desired a full account of Paris and her doings. "In sh' Allah, thou wast happy there!" they all exclaimed. When she replied, "My happiness is here with you," the answer gave unbounded satisfaction. From their remarks she learnt, to her no small amazement, that Hâfiz Bey was the son of her old friend Amînah Khânum.

"Thou didst not know?" they cried. "How can that be? And Bedr-ul-Budûr — surely thou hast heard of her — the slave whose beauty the Princess was always vaunting? It is very strange!"

The placid gossip and the shaded calm existence were delightful after months of agitation. Barakah fell into the harîm habits with enthusiasm, devouring sweetstuff at all hours, enjoying cigarettes and the narghileh. The best part of her morning was spent at the bath, where the ladies met for gossip and for healthful exercise; her afternoon in seeing visitors or paying visits. Gulbeyzah came to see her, radiating gladness, extolling not her husband but her fellow-wives.

"We spend such merry days together," she informed her friend. "Oh, how much better than to be an only wife!"

When Barakah returned the visit, she was received by the four durrahs with one voice of wel-

come. The four together formed a charming small society, quite independent of the husband's humours and the outside world. All their possessions they enjoyed in common, even children. Barakah was begged to come and see them often, and to love them all.

She would have been completely happy in those days but for embarrassment arising from a secret which she longed yet feared to tell. She was with child. Suspicion grew to certainty and still she put off the announcement, dreading the outcry of these candid women and the harîm ceremonies. It slipped from her by accident, one afternoon, and the fuss they made proved even worse than expectation.

Amînah Khânum brought Bedr-ul-Budûr to see her, saying:

"This girl of mine has news to tell you."

The old Princess herself proclaimed the news with praise to Allah. A flush suffused the listener from head to foot.

"I too—" she murmured, and then stopped in great confusion. Amînah Khânum pounced on her with eager questions. Bedr-ul-Budûr knelt down before her in an ecstasy.

"Thou, too, art blest? And thou has kept it secret all this while?" the Princess cried. "O Bedr, go and beg the lady Fitnah to come hither instantly!"

"No, no!" entreated Barakah, distraught with shame.

"Yes, yes!" replied the other, scoffing at her. "Is this the famed false modesty of England? Praise God Most High that thou art fruitful, praise Him loudly!"

The joy of Fitnah Khânum passed all bounds. She sent a messenger at once to Yûsuf, another to the Pasha, with the tidings. The Pasha came at once to pay his compliments to Barakah. Yûsuf came later, having thought it necessary to circulate the happy news among his friends. Ghandûr, who, as the water-carrier of the apartment, sat always in the alley, underneath the lady's lattice, was heard intoning a loud song of triumph, three parts prayer, of which each verse concluded with: "Twin boys, in sh'Allah!"

Joy-shrieks resounded; the whole household smiled; her friends thronged round her, informed of her good luck as if by miracle, for black-shrouded newsbearers were ever flitting by shadowed walls, along the edge of crowded markets, linking the great harîms in one society, and what was done in one was known in all. And Barakah alone saw any call for shame or reticence.

From that day forth she was the idol of her little world, her every want forestalled by warm solicitude. Murjânah Khânum talked to her in a religious strain; Fitnah, more homely, prepared dainties for her; the Pasha's sister came and told her stories. The very children talked aloud of her condition, and hailed it as a blessing to the house.

She had a good excuse for shunning the festivities which took place on the arrival of the Emperor of the French in Cairo; though her husband was employed in the reception, and all the ladies were agog to see the Empress. She wished to be entirely Oriental. Frankish talk disgusted her. Any reminder that the Europeans still existed was annoying; how much more to hear them vaunted by her Eastern friends. Yûsuf himself made fun of her fanaticism. The women humoured her conceit with knowing smiles.

Gulbeyzah and Bedr-ul-Budûr, both in the same condition, were her constant visitors. Amînah Khânum gave advice in her brusque way, and as the Englishwoman's time drew near, did more for her protection than she knew of in her illness; impressing on Muhammad Pasha through Murjânah the necessity of calling in a Frankish doctor, and herself procuring from the Mufti the religious judgment which stilled the angry outcry of the harîm midwives.

The hour of trial came at length — an anguish worse than death, succeeded by a happiness as calm as heaven. From the cries of jubilation filling all the house, from the blessings showered on her within the chamber, she knew that she had borne a son. She saw the blue of evening at the lattice, heard the murmur of the tired city like a voice of waters, and, lulled by vast contentment, fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIX

Never in her life had Barakah seen so many strange old women. There were always four or five of them within her chamber, squatting on mats along the wall, conversing in low tones, ready at a breath to rearrange her pillows, or fetch some posset that was ordered for her. They were all of apelike ugliness, and, going barefoot, moved as noiselessly as ghosts.

The Frankish doctor — an Italian — had pronounced her much too frail to nurse her baby — a decision which excited such dependants of the house as were eligible for the post of foster-mother. This was a great prize, kinship by milk, among the Muslims, being esteemed as genuine and binding as by blood. The wet-nurse thus became a near relation of the family, and all her race had claims upon its bounty. Barakah felt jealous of the woman who usurped her function, till she heard from Fitnah Khânum that the choice had fallen on the wife of her old friend Ghandûr. The girl, a former slave of the harîm, was then presented to her, the baby in her arms; and won her heart by her excessive gratitude. She was touched, too, by the transports of Ghandûr,

who sang thanksgiving to her lattice in his simple way. His chant was something in this manner:

"The sun is in my eyes! O happy day!
I grope as one half-blind. Behold the bounty of my lord!
I, the poor slave of Allah,
Am now the father of his son Abdallah,
My wife the mother of his son, by leave of Allah,
My little boy the brother of a child most blest, in sh'Allah!
The gracious consort of my lord, istaghfar Allah!
Has granted to our lowliness a share in her good gift from Allah.
May Allah bless my lord and lady in their noble offspring, and preserve his life to be the luminary of our future days."

She liked to hear him, his voice so near at hand produced a sense of true devotion and security. Missing his chant upon the following day, she inquired what had become of him. She was informed that, consequent upon his wife's preferment, he had been appointed to a small position in the Government. It made her sad.

Her son was given over to the harîm midwives to fulfil no end of ceremonies destined to frustrate the powers of evil. For a week he was not left alone or in the dark a single second. They carried him in a procession through the house, his future kingdom, and as each door was opened, sprinkled salt mixed with the seven seeds to exorcize the jinn who lurked within. Soon after birth his face had been defiled with certain powders, which Barakah could not persuade the women to wash off. It was a necessary precaution, they assured her, against jealous powers

of darkness who, if they had an inkling of his beauty, would destroy him. Chief among these was the discarded wife of Adam, alluded to as El Carînah (the companion), the cause of man's first fall, who hates Eve's daughters and resents their great fertility. Where a child seems lovely and the mother shows delight in its appearance, she attacks them both; if, on the contrary, she sees it ugly and hears words of disappointment, she lets it live to spite the seed of Adam. For one so powerful, she must be very stupid to be taken in by such pretences, Barakah remarked; but they cried out that such was not the case, but Allah in His mercy had set limits to her sight and hearing. Each day the infant was the central figure in some ancient rite believed essential to its welfare.

As Barakah lay in bed and watched the pattern of the lattice, her whole existence passing like a dream before her, she sought to reconcile her former English with her present Eastern life. Her son was a fine boy, they all assured her. It saddened her that she had no relations of her own to take a pride in him. In this mood she asked Yûsuf to write a little note to Mrs. Cameron entreating her to come one day and see the baby. He did so, and the answer was that she would come with pleasure.

Elated by the prospect of this visit, Barakah wished to have her offspring made presentable; but when she gave command to wash his face and wrap him in nice clothes, the goodies screamed aloud, and

fetched the lady Fitnah to remonstrate with her. She gave way, perforce; and Mrs. Cameron beheld the infant at his worst.

The visitor was very kind in her address to Barakah; but, when she held the baby for a minute, looking down at it, the latter, watching keenly, saw upon her face a quiver of extreme disfavour mixed with pity. The whiteness of her hands and face showed the child yellow; Barakah had thought him white as snow till then. A flush of anger and humiliation reached her brain.

"His face is dirty, the poor little one! Our Lord preserve him!" the visitor remarked in Arabic as she returned the baby to his nurse; at which there was an outburst of applause from the onlookers. They called down blessings on the lady's head, desiring she might have herself a thousand children, not like this one, puny and unpleasant, but most beautiful.

Barakah, consumed with rage, murmured hoarsely in response to Mrs. Cameron's farewell. The moment she was gone she burst out weeping.

"She did not like the child! She scorned my son, because he is not altogether white as she is."

"Thou mistakest, O my dear! Be comforted!" cried Fitnah Khânum, while the other women round her exchanged pitying glances.

"Thou are not yet perfect in our prudent customs; but thy friend, though not a Muslimah, has learnt them, having been much longer in the land.

Hast thou forgotten my instructions touching El Carînah? Nor is she alone to be redoubted, since Allah Himself abhors a boastful spirit, and dishonours those who make too much of any creature. . . ."

"O Lord! I know all that!" wailed Barakah. "But she disliked my child, despised him! I — I saw it!"

Conviction that the portion of the human race from which she sprang beheld her son as little better than a monkey, tortured Barakah. She had looked upon him as a mediator, but now sought revenge. Hot, feverish dreams of hate disturbed her rest; and when a spell of khamsîn weather robbed the world of energy she grew as weak and fretful as her thoughts were wild.

Already Barakah had kept her bed a fortnight longer than any Eastern woman would have dreamt of doing after childbirth. The lady Fitnah, seeing she did not gain strength, believed that some debilitating vile afrît was in her. The Frankish doctor said there was no cause of fear. She called him fool and worse, in her own circle; since by his disregard or ignorance of pious formulas he had left the door ajar for evil spirits. Resolved to stop the mischief, when no man was by she hung a plant of garlic in the room, burnt potent odours till its air grew suffocating, and dosed the patient with a paste compounded of the dust of mummies mixed with human milk. When these means failed to drive away the

enemy, she sat down in despair among her cronies, and braced herself to try the last resort of all.

This was the "zâr"— a very awful ceremony, of which she was exceedingly afraid. Her wish to hold it in the house — risking the Pasha's favour, and her life through terror — was proof of her devoted love for Barakah. The dear one must be healed at any price.

Accordingly, she summoned negresses of those who hold familiar intercourse with demons, bought a kid and several fowls alive, and made arrangements to secure the sickroom to herself and her confederates for two good hours upon a certain afternoon.

Barakah was roused out of a troubled sleep by women moving out the furniture from both bedchamber and salon, and covering the floor with worn-out linen and the cheapest matting. They went, and she lay wondering, when Fitnah Khânum came and bade her have no fear. The ceremony she was going to witness was a potent medicine, well calculated to restore her health completely. Many servants, female children, and familiars of the household trooped in with noiseless feet and squatted down along the wall. Then came a group of half a dozen negresses, fantastically dressed in rags of finery, with ringing anklets; one of whom embraced a struggling little goat, while the others bore live chickens by the feet. Bold-eyed and with a swaggering gait, they marched up to the bed, and seemed to offer up the fowls and kid to Barakah, who could not under-

stand the words they uttered in a screeching chant. They then danced back to the adjoining room, of which the door stood open. Upon the threshold madness seemed to seize them. They fell upon the kid with cries of glee. The creature, bleating piteously, was flung into an earthen bowl placed there in readiness. Amid mad laughter knives were brandished and brought down, hands helping to extract the creature's life. The fowls were likewise gashed and torn asunder; the matting round grew foul with steaming entrails. Another minute and the slayers reappeared, their black arms purpled to the elbow, dripping blood, their faces and their lips defiled with it; and then began a devilish dance of self-abandonment, all the more horrible for its approach to beauty. The sleek skin of the dancers caught blue lights; their fixed eyes gleamed enormous, like those painted on the lids of mummies. Barakah believed herself in hell, for ever lost; it was as if an iron hand compressed her throat. Her heart beat wildly. One of the women, the most shameless, lurched towards her, stretching out a blood-stained hand. Her heart gave one tremendous beat and then stood still.

When she recovered consciousness it was to find the lady Fitnah bending over her. The negresses had gone, the room was cleansed, the furniture replaced exactly as before. She might have thought she had been dreaming had not Yûsuf's mother whispered eagerly:

"Breathe not a word to Yûsuf or our lord the Pasha. Deny by Allah that thou sawest anything. If not, the afrît which we have with pains extracted will return and kill thee."

In her weak state of mind, oppressed with dreadful and disgusting images, Barakah believed the words and shuddered. She was ill for weeks.

CHAPTER XX

During the heat of summer, part of the harîm, consisting of the ladies Barakah and Fitnah, with their children and attendants, stayed at a farm belonging to the Pasha, on the banks of the Nile, near Benha. The journey thither was performed on donkeys in a long procession with a eunuch at its head and tail, a eunuch boy leading the donkey of each lady, that she might have freedom to hold up her sunshade and munch nuts and sweetstuff. The slave-girls, some of them, rode two together; they waxed hilarious, exchanging jests with all who passed them on the dyke. Their going raised a goodly cloud of dust. The house to which they went was large and formal, none too clean, though very sparsely furnished. Behind it was a filthy yard hemmed in by hovels, where dwelt the fellâhîn who worked the farm. Before it was a garden of fruit trees, and beyond that a plantation of young date-palms. There was also a big tree beside a water-wheel, where the ladies took their pleasure in the shade. The land was absolutely flat in all directions, but diversified in hue by divers crops, broken here and there by clumps of trees and squat mud villages.

Here manners were relaxed; for all the peas-

ant women went unveiled, and their example made the slaves less strict than in the city. The lady Fitnah, being of the country, took delight in talking with the villagers, both men and women, and thus, though most correct in her apparel, set the fashion of unbending. Yûsuf, who had now a Government appointment, and the Pasha came to see them when they had the leisure; and Ghandûr also travelled down to see his wife.

To please the lady Fitnah, Barakah gave French and English lessons to the children in the mornings under the great tree, when many of the servants also gathered round and tried to learn. She was begged to be particularly strict with Hamdi, whom the lady Fitnah seemed to think the soul of wickedness, as indeed did everybody else, making his life a burden with perpetual scolding.

This boy, her husband's younger brother, was attached to Barakah as the only one who never shook him by the neck or cursed him. He told her all his woes, and brought her offerings of curious things he found in his illicit rambles. He was always straying, though with no worse object, he asserted, than the wish to be alone. His lady mother called him "stupid Turk," vowing that he was all his father's child, and she herself had neither part nor lot in him; though Hamdi was the true Egyptian adolescent, still but half awake, a slave to every breeze, to every odour, and fascinated by the sight of gleaming objects. He would sit still for hours in contempla-

tion of a sunlit blade of grass; at other times he would walk miles, drawn on invisibly, with great brown eyes which seemed to harbour visions. Barakah found him gentle and obedient. In truth, his only wickedness that she could see consisted in resentment of shrill interruptions. At such times he would battle blindly with assailants, cursing them, and crying out, in his despair:

"Am I not a man full-grown? Do I not sleep in the selamlik? Then let me be, or it shall be the worse for you, by Allah!"

"A man full-grown, thou sayest?" screamed the lady Fitnah one evening when he came home soaked in mud from head to foot. "Listen, O child of dogs, O malefactor! Knowest thou what I shall do on our return to town. I shall marry thee at once to Na'imah, thy uncle's child. Thy clothes are in a filthy state, thy tassel gone. Thou hast been sprawling in some ditch, O piggish boy! By the Prophet, I shall do as I have said. Sure, matrimony is the only cure for one like thee. Thou shalt wed Na'imah."

"Allah forbid!" exclaimed the lad with fervour; whereat the ladies and the servants burst out laughing; for Na'imah, Leylah Khânum's youngest daughter, had been Hamdi's chief tormentor there at home, disturbing his still dreams with impish glee, and quick to vanish.

"Is it not cruel thus to hound me?" the unlucky boy asked Barakah. "I do no wrong; they inter-

fere with me. And now my mother threatens to unite me to the most hateful daughter of a dog that ever yelped and bit."

The month of Ramadan came on them in their country life; and the long hours of heat without a bite or sup made everybody irritable except Barakah and the wife of Ghandûr, who were both exempt from fasting — the former as an invalid, the latter as a nursing-mother. The slave-girls lost their usual delight in birds and greenery. A gun fired in the distant market-town announced the moment of release in the first bloom of night; but the party failed to hear it sometimes, and looked out for the lighting of the lamps around a village mosque across the plain. At once arose vast sighs of praise to Allah; cigarettes, prepared in readiness, were seized and lighted; water was handed round and food set out.

It was at that blest hour upon a certain evening of the sacred month that a rapturous surprise befell the party. A little cavalcade was seen approaching on the dyke. It consisted of two donkeys and a baggage mule. A woman sat up on the foremost donkey; on the second rode two children, boy and girl; while the mule was led by a black-bearded, turbaned man of noble presence. The ladies, sitting in the garden, peered, then shouted:

"Tâhir! It is Tâhir! Tâhir, the great singer! O most blessed day! Enter, O son of honour! Deign to favour us!"

Learning that the master of the house was absent,

Tâhir would not enter, but sought a lodging in the hovels of the fellâhîn, whither a rich meal was sent to him. But after supper he came up into the garden with his lute, followed timidly by all the population of the hamlet; and his wife and children stole into the room where all the women sat with windows open, looking forward to the concert. Once more his little daughter drew to Barakah, and, having kissed her hand, sat down and leaned against her. "I love thee," she explained, with a soft look; and then with a wide yawn exclaimed: "I am so tired!" Barakah put her arm about her, and the child seemed happy. She did not go to sleep this time, however, but lay still, fondling her protector's hand, and gazing up at the great stars.

"See, what a man he is!" exclaimed the Galla slave, Fatûmah, her hand upon the shoulder of her mistress, all respect forgotten in intense excitement. "He does not even stay to tune his lute. All that is for the common singers. He is much above it. By Allah, he would sing to a dog's howl and make it musical."

One twang of the lute, and then the magic voice arose from out the shadow of the trees. It gave a living spirit to the starlight, a soul to all the nights that ever were or would be. It seemed illumination, yet was all of mystery; it gave the listener a sense of floating disembodied.

Once, when Tâhir paused to rest, the voice of

Hamdi was heard in the garden, begging for leave to hold his lute and play it.

"That boy again! Cut short his life!" cried Fitnah Khânum. "Devoid of manners as of sensibility. Remove him quickly!"

But Tâhir answered pleasantly: "Here, O my son! Take it and play for me. Observe the measure. Strike loudly in the pauses, softly while I sing." And Fatûmah, quite beside herself, exclaimed:

"Behold the man he is! He can dispense with all things. That which would ruin the performance of another singer is a joy to him."

Hamdi acquitted himself fairly well of the task of accompaniment and won a word of praise from Tâhir, which so moved him that when the singer was departing the next morning early, he stole out to him, and, looking round to ascertain that he was heard of none save Barakah, entreated:

"Take me with thee, O my uncle. Instruct me, let me play for thee for ever. This girl, thy daughter, this little sugar-plum, shall be my bride. Then we can all live happily together."

"The honour is too high for us, O my small lord!" the singer answered, with his charming smile. "Thy lot in life is better far, in sh'Allah, than that of us poor players."

"But they say that thou canst earn a hundred pounds a night."

"Seldom as much as that, beloved. And my living is at Allah's pleasure. It is a gift from Him, to whom be praise. Come to me four years hence, and we will think about it."

With a dignified salute he started off; the children, on their donkey, waved their hands and screamed farewell. Hamdi was left standing disappointed and a trifle injured.

"O my misfortune!" he exclaimed to Barakah. "I would have given my right hand to go with him. Like that I could escape from persecution and accursed Na'imah, and dwell for ever in the sound of music which transports my soul. Allah is greatest!"

And he heaved a mighty sigh.

When the month of fasting ended, there were mild rejoicings. The fellâhîn fired guns and let off fireworks. The women smoked too much and over-ate themselves, and felt aggrieved at being far from Cairo, where the means of satisfaction were more varied and abundant.

Then Yûsuf and the Pasha came and stayed a week; delighted, coming fresh to it, with the unoccupied existence over which the others had begun to yawn. At the end of the week they all returned to Cairo, the procession of the ladies keeping half a mile behind their lords. The first view of the citadel on one hand, the pyramids of Gîzah on the other, called forth thankful shouts. The coloured, noisy streets, the odours sweet and foul, the atmosphere of

teeming life, excited Barakah. She joined in exclamations of delight.

While she gazed with strange eyes at her gilded salon, superintending the disposal of her baggage, a letter was presented to her by Fatûmah. It had been given to the latter that same minute by Sawwâb the eunuch, who had had it in safe keeping for two months. It was from Mrs. Cameron.

Barakah, frowning, opened it and read:

"It grieves me much to learn that you have been seriously ill. I heard of this quite by accident from Doctor Torranelli, whom I chanced to meet at a friend's house. In some anxiety, I tried to call upon you yesterday, but learnt that you are absent in the country. I trust that the dear baby flourishes. He must be a great comfort and delight to you. Please never forget that I am your sincere friend."

With an exclamation of annoyance, she tore up the note.

CHAPTER XXI

The idea of seeing Mrs. Cameron again was quite intolerable. She therefore wrote that lady a brief note, an asp for venom, designed to terminate acquaintance and to rankle, and plunged into the harîm pleasures with sensations of defiance.

One morning, as she lounged upon her cushioned window-seat, smoking her narghileh and listening to the voices wafted with the sunlight through her lattice, Fatûmah came and with a grin announced that Hamdi Bey desired an audience of her Honour. She gave the word, and in came Hamdi, knuckling his two eyes.

"O day of pitch!" he cried. "O vile nefarious day! O my beloved sister, hide me, save me! My father has enforced my mother's harsh command. I am to be married to-day to that unholy child of dogs — against my will. I wished to wait a thousand years. Ghandûr is waiting at this minute to conduct me to the bath."

As if in confirmation of his words, the voice of Ghandûr shouted in the street without: "Make haste, O Hamdi! Lo, the sun is high! The shadow is already on the stone thou fixedst for a limit when I let thee enter."

"Thou hearest," snuffled Hamdi, "how they hound me? He has my wedding garments in a bundle — O my hatred! Guests have been bidden — may their fathers perish! Go to my mother (she will hear thee); plead that I may be allowed a few months' respite. It is Na'imah who, through her mother, hastens on the match. She would destroy my new-found freedom and torment me."

Barakah could not help laughing, though she uttered words of comfort. Na'imah was a very pretty girl, she pointed out, and not ill-natured, though a great coquette. He would have none of it, but shook his head with ominous frowns.

"I hate her!" he declared. "And knowest thou? I have a mind to drown myself this morning at the bath."

Then, as Ghandûr's calls became insistent, he left the room with slow, reluctant steps.

The wedding was a small affair, the parties being children of one house, and their betrothal (which is legal marriage) having taken place in infancy. The bride, enthroned, showed none of the reluctance felt by Hamdi. A bright-eyed and determined little maiden, she was wreathed in smiles; and when Barakah inquired if she were truly happy, replied, "The praise to Allah!" with decision.

Next day the house was full of smothered laughter. Hamdi was completely changed. He and his bride were now the fondest pair. The lady Fitnah, who had always held that matrimony was a panacea for

the crotchets of young people, male and female, rendered praise where praise was due. For many days, through shame, the bridegroom hid from Barakah, and from every one else to whom he had proclaimed his dread of marriage.

When she told Gulbeyzah of the case as of a kind of miracle, the Circassian answered:

"I perceive no cause for wonder. The bridegroom had not thought of her before in that relation, had not truly known her — that is all. Love is a blessing that brings gratitude as surely as the Nile makes plants to grow."

Gulbeyzah and Bedr-ul-Budûr — nay, all her friends — viewed love, apart from any individual man, as a material boon. Bred up to it and ripened for it cunningly, they were ready to adore the man who gave it, however unattractive from a European standpoint. This view of love, when realized, explained to Barakah the happiness which every girl of her acquaintance seemed to find in marriage, even where, as in Gulbeyzah's case, the husband was a greybeard thrice her age. Those who possessed it were content and virtuous. In those who had it not, or were deprived of it, all amorous crime was reckoned pardonable.

Gulbeyzah and Bedr-ul-Budûr explained all this to Barakah in thrilling tones, as if they uttered truths divine.

"Behold the wisdom of our Faith," they said, "which grants to every woman this delight in secret.

Women can never truly be the friends of men; their soul is different. If thrown with men for long, they feel fatigue. They ask of men one thing — the gift of love. Here we consort with women, true companions, all day long; and in the night the bridegroom comes, and we are blest. Is not this better than the way of Europe, which sets at nought apparent truths — as that most men love more than one of us, whereas most women need but love itself, the hope of children?"

That was one of the occasions when Barakah would have given anything to have an Englishwoman present, and to watch her face. Another came a few days later when she called upon Gulbeyzah. Alighting from her carriage at the palace door, she saw a baby's coffin being carried out, and thought at once of turning home again. But already smiling eunuchs stood before her bidding welcome, beseeching her to deign to follow them to the haramlik. Gulbeyzah met her with a kiss on either cheek.

"Come, help us to console Nasîbah," she exclaimed. "Her baby died this night. She is distracted."

She drew her friend into a chamber where the childless mother lay, face downward, moaning, while the others tried to soothe her.

"It is no matter," was the burden of their consolations. "It is not as if thou wert left altogether desolate. Are we not one, we four? Thou hast two

children left, since ours are thine, and in a day or two Gulbeyzah will present thee with a third, in sh' Allah!"

"In sh'Allah!" cried Gulbeyzah. "And it shall be thine entirely. Directly it is born it shall be sent to thee to nurse. I will forget it. And when it is thy turn again, thou wilt repay me. Is not that a good idea?"

Oh that English people, who regard polygamy as something dreadful, could have witnessed that small scene! The wish, escaping Barakah at unawares, begot a heartache, as she realised that all she saw and heard for their instruction was thwarted of its natural vent for evermore.

She told herself that she was happy in this life; and so she was upon the surface, where she kept her thoughts, not daring to pry down into the depths. In the early days she had desired more knowledge of the Muslim faith, and a woman learned in religion had been hired to teach her. But the fury of that faith, the scathing nature of its truths, appalled her, awaking recollections of a creed more sentimental, with distressing doubts. She very soon gave up her lessons, closed the eyes of her intelligence, and resolutely sought her pleasure in the passing hour.

Still there were moments when vague fears oppressed her. When, in the third year of her marriage, she brought forth a still-born child, frightful abysses seemed to yawn around her, and for days she was afflicted with a kind of nightmare of misgiv-

ing, derived from recollection of the Zâr and other horrors.

The Eastern ladies were so calm and strong compared with her; they flinched at nothing except impropriety. The slaughter of a thousand sheep at Curban Bairam, turning the kitchen court into a shambles, caused them no disgust. It was ordained of God, they told her, and it fed the poor. They had no horror of disease or death or filthy persons, and, though most cleanly, looked on vermin philosophically. The Turks and the Circassians, with their grand ideals, appeared more dreadful than the Africans, whose faith was childlike. Barakah preferred the latter. Her pleasure was in feasts and little outings, in story-tellers, dancers, and musicians who beguile the time; her only rapture was in adoration of her small Muhammed.

Her hidden yearnings and beliefs clung round the boy. She dwelt in longing for the days when he should be her friend. He was her hope, the product of both parts of her divided life; giving it sense and sequence, and, in the end perhaps, if Allah willed, consistency. She dreamt of a great future for him, to astonish Europe. But in the meanwhile, being sometimes dull, she felt the need of an intelligent, discreet companion.

CHAPTER XXII

On the recurrence of certain anniversaries, at the two Bairams and in the month of Ragab, all Muslim Cairo left the city of the living for the cities of the dead adjoining it upon the east and south. Mothers of sorrow like Murjânah Khânum, whose heart was with her children in the grave, inhabited the mausoleums for a week or more; but the majority performed a one-day visit.

Blue night alive with stars was at her lattice when Barakah was softly roused by her attendants and arrayed in proper garb. She found Leylah Khânum and her daughters waiting for her by the mabeyn screen, where the eunuch had a heap of roses and of henna-flowers to give them, as well as branches of palm and sweet basil. With these they made their way out to the carriage.

The principal streets were thronged with people going in the same direction: men in clean robes, who yawned, still half asleep; women, black-shrouded, bearing palm-branches, with trays of eatables upon their heads; small girls in tinselled gauze of divers colours, and boys in stiff new clothing — all with earnest faces, pressing out towards the cemeteries. Barakah kept peeping through the shutter at the

solemn crowd, to which the fitful gleam of swinging lanterns added weirdness. The concourse gave forth a dull clatter, above which was heard the rumble of the carriage wheels upon the stones, the shouts the coachman raised to clear a way. Then suddenly all noise of going ceased, although their wheels still rolled and the besetting throng was even denser than before. They were on sand. The people murmured like a shell. The desert hill rose imminent against the stars. On all sides spread a wilderness of humble graves, each with its family group encamped beside the headstone. Then came a steep incline, up which the horses struggled under whip and cursing; and lo! they were once more in city streets. On every hand rose shadowy buildings, domes, and minarets. A swarm of beggars went from door to door with sacks and trays collecting doles of food.

Alighting at the gate of a large mosque-like building, Barakah and her companions were conducted through a courtyard to the women's quarters. Fitnah and Murjânah, who had spent the night there with attendants, made them welcome; after which they paid a visit to the mausoleum proper, or the women's side of it — for the house of death itself was subdivided by a harîm screen. Here, in a gloom made spectral by the hanging lamps, women of repute for sanctity, hired mourners, were reciting the Corân, and through the screen some male professors could be heard performing the same office in strong nasal tones. The visitors bestowed their flowers and

bits of palm among the graves, and, having said some prayers, returned to the apartment, where preparations for a feast were being made.

Already the muezzin's chant announced the dawn. Murjânah Khânum was at her devotions on a corner of the dais. The other ladies, who deemed prayer the man's affair, helped in the work of setting out the breakfast. While this was going on, a woman and three children rushed in from the twilight court, and with loud blessings began kissing hands.

"It is the wife and children of the guardian of this place, who makes the graves," Na'imah, her nearest neighbour, informed Barakah. "They come for their accustomed gifts of food and raiment. See, Fitnah Khânum is just going to bestow them in the name of all of us."

A minute later the grave-digger's wife and children were at Barakah kissing her hand repeatedly and crying, "May it be many a year ere we receive thee here, O queen of charms."

The Englishwoman shivered at this form of compliment; and then a strange old woman, who had been observing her, sidled across the room and squatted at her feet.

"O Umm ed-Dahak, welcome!" exclaimed Na'imah. "Where hast thou been this long while, that we have not seen thee? There has been no fun at all in life without thee. How is thy health? What new jests dost thou bring us?"

But the old woman had not come, it seemed, to

talk to Na'imah; for, replying to these questions in the briefest manner possible, she addressed herself to Barakah in coaxing whispers.

"Art thou not happy, O my pearl? I could see from over there that something ailed thee. Is it the thought of death, the air of tombs? The spectacle of graves should rather cheer the living. Give praise to God that thou art still alive; enjoy existence! Allah is merciful! It is certain that He has made provision for our sex hereafter — a finer paradise than that of men, in sh'Allah! Ha, ha! What faces, thinkest thou, the men would wear if they knew we had heavenly youths for our enjoyment, in our place apart? By Allah, it would spoil their pleasure in the black-eyed maids! I see them sulking even in the home of bliss. . . . The air is chill thus early; the end of night is always a sad hour. A delicate soft flower like thee is dashed by it. Come, let me talk to warm thee. I am called the Mother of Laughter, thou hast heard! . . .

"Knowest thou what my daughter said in her soul when first her spouse unveiled her? She said (and be the saying far from thee), the while she stood with eyes downcast and bosom rising, falling, "May Allah strike me blind this minute if I am half so innocent as thou art, O my knowing lord!' And she managed him, I can assure thee. Ah, she fooled him perfectly — exclaiming ever at his wisdom, bowing to his lightest word. It is thus we subtle ones beguile the world — the great strong simpleton! —

never opposing, lest he knock us down. By Allah, I must ask thy pardon for thus prattling; but ladies condescend to find my talk amusing. I can recount the origin of all that is, being most learned in religious matters. If I chose, I could be howling with those cats in there,"— she nodded towards the hired performers in the tomb,—" but they are hypocrites and gloomy. I love merriment. It has long been my desire to meet a foreign lady, to whom I might impart my knowledge of this land. The Franks have great intelligence, and would admire my lore. All the stories of the harîm I can teach thee. . . .

" Thou knowest the three wives of Ali Bey El Halebi. The red-haired one — the former slave — was killed last night. I had it but an hour ago from a sure source. Her sin, though great, was pardonable, Allah knows. Her husband had neglected her disgracefully; the fact is known. She turned for comfort to a street musician. She lost her wit, it seemed, and made confession. I could have saved her, with the help of Allah, had she come to me. The eunuchs held her so — and, click! her neck was severed. Her corpse is floating down the Nile, dismembered or buried in the garden — Allah knows! Ah! I could keep thee interested for a year together."

The old creature's flattery, more subtle in the tone and manner than the words convey, was irresistible; her twinkling eyes and ever shifting wrinkles aroused the Englishwoman's sense of humour, which had long been dormant.

"Praise be to Allah, thou art better!" smiled the crone.

The sun had risen now; the lamps were useless; the city of the dead was blushing like the rose; the chanting of the readers in the tomb had lost its sadness. Barakah was staring at the strange old woman's face, now plainly visible. Where had she known it? Feature for feature, it resembled one which had been long imprinted in her memory. Umm ed-Dahak grinned when she became aware of this perplexity. With a very roguish look for one so old, she laid her cheek upon her open palm and whispered, "Yûsuf! Come!" It was the same old creature who, luring the future bride of Yûsuf from her chamber in Muhammad Pasha's house, had been seized and beaten by the eunuchs in the hall, and never seen again until this day.

"Rememberest thou?" she slyly asked. "Allah witness, I was tempted with a bribe. Young men are devils! Never ask me to explain. I cannot bear to be reminded of it, may Our Lord forgive me! We are all weak creatures and succumb occasionally; but Fitnah Khânum will assure thee I am to be trusted."

With that and a most friendly smile, she edged away, repairing straight to Fitnah Khânum, with whom she held some animated conversation in low tones. The lady, at her instance, shortly came across to Barakah and whispered:

"That old woman seeks thy patronage. I myself have found her useful and obliging. To thee,

a foreigner, she could afford much help. Thou needest some one. Umm ed-Dahak is the best I know."

"Umm ed-Dahak!" cried out Na'imah. "Why there is no creature in the world to match her for facetiousness. She was the rapture of our life as children. Nobody could be dull or sad with Umm ed-Dahak. She is like a monkey and a clever servant and a mother all in one!"

This joyful cry was overheard by Leylah Khânum, who frowned upon her daughter and rebuked her sharply. In that place conversation must be held in whispers and only ritual words pronounced aloud. The party breakfasted in solemn silence, to the sound of chanting from the tomb. But the aged Mother of Laughter smiled and nodded — even winked — at Barakah whenever their eyes met, which was not seldom; and the Englishwoman had a new sensation of relief and sympathy. At last she had found somebody who understood her.

CHAPTER XXIII

Upon the morrow Barakah had quite forgotten the old woman; she was lounging on a sofa, smoking after breakfast, watching the slave-girls dress Muhammad, when Umm ed-Dahak stole in barefoot, making reverence. The crone sank down before her as of right, and kissing her feet, asked how she did and praised her loveliness. Then, looking at the infant, she exclaimed in natural tones, "Ma sh'Allah! May Our Lord preserve him in all times and places!" and straightway began making baby noises.

Barakah thought the moment opportune for getting at the secret of that incident which teased her memory. But Umm ed-Dahak, though she answered volubly, made no disclosure. Indeed, as Barakah soon learnt, that seeming reckless chatterer was in the habit of imparting only what she chose to tell. It was manifest that half her compliments were insincere, nor did she take the slightest trouble to disguise the fact; but in the intervals of soporific fiction and pure blandishment she spoke of things worth knowing in a tone of frank good-will. She knew the why and how of every custom, the stories giving rise to every proverb, and was so acute a judge of human

character that her gossip had the flavour of an intellectual game. Her wiles, it seemed, were worn to show her cleverness, or cynically, to travesty arts which flourish in this transitory world.

She became a member of the household, but with privileges. Barakah was the sultan, she the grand vizier, it was agreed. No monarch ever had a more delightful minister. She made the slave-girls more attentive to their mistress, whose comfort she increased in a variety of ways. She knew where to lay her hands upon the leading story-tellers and musicians, and was herself the most accomplished female mountebank at that time living. She soon learnt every mood of her protectress, and its antidote. The latest scandal dwelt at her tongue's tip.

The whole harîm knew Umm ed-Dahak as a joker. Slaves from outside were always coining pretexts to enter the apartment, just to look at her, and the more frivolous among the ladies came to hear her stories.

"I am for them a comical performance, not a child of Adam," she told Barakah. "How different from thy kindness, O my sovereign lady! Thy gracious condescension feeds and clothes me."

Therewith she kissed the hand of Barakah, who was affected. By such small means did she confirm her sway.

Her intelligence, her laughing view of life, were stimulating, and prevented Barakah from brooding upon hopeless problems.

Without attempting to fatigue her mind in vain attempts to grasp the universe — as Europeans do, inviting pessimism — this old woman took her portion as it came, with relish and a very searching scrutiny. She likened herself sometimes to a fisher of the Nile, who all his life frequents one reach alone. He knows the currents and the mud-banks, marks the winds, and, without preoccupation with the river's source or outlet, is cunning in the art of bringing fish to land. The soul of her philosophy was non-resistance; her morality held all means lawful to escape oppression.

"God is gracious and all-knowing," she would shrug. "He gives to all His creatures, great and small, the wherewithal to move in their appointed element — to birds wings, fins to fishes, guile to women."

In her time, she admitted, many sins had soiled her hands; shameful employments had defiled her countenance. They would be pardoned, being but a means to live. She held, against the world's opinion, that Allah is indulgent to the faults of women and even has a secret fondness for them. Yet, with her guile, she had an admiration for pure virtue, a teardrop for true love, wherever found. And with all her common sense and her acuteness she was superstitious. As the fisher of the Nile, her chosen image, wears an amulet and names the name of power before he casts his net, so Umm ed-Dahak armed her-

self against malignant influences. Her belief in witchcraft, philtres, and all kinds of charms was quite beyond the reach of argument.

The old woman never asked for any wages. She took what food she wanted, helped herself to cigarettes, and called for a narghileh when the fancy seized her. By the Pasha's order, in accordance with a pious custom observed at that time in good Muslim houses, eatables, such as meat and milk and vegetables which might go bad, were not kept overnight, the remainder of each day's provision being given in the evening to the poor dependants. Of this dole Umm ed-Dahak claimed her share. If she required a garment or a gift of money, she did not beg for it, but told some tortuous and lengthy story which ended in a present as snakes end in tails. When Barakah saw through the artifice, she was in no way disconcerted. She merely smiled and praised her quick intelligence.

"Her need is real, for she is poor," said Fitnah Khânum, when Barakah remarked on the old woman's foibles. "But she loves subtlety far more than comfort, and would refuse high monthly wages, to obtain a lesser sum by stealth and coaxing, as occasion offered. She has had much money given to her, to my knowledge; but it is as dust to her. She is like the clever fellow in the story, who, having earned much money by his ingenuity, scrambled it among the crowd; and in the end, when it was finished, sighed, 'O Allah, would that I had all the gold on

earth to go on flinging it and see men fight like dogs for its possession!'"

Fitnah, though she scolded the old woman, had a liking for her company and waggish talk. And Umm ed-Dahak, being very diplomatic, paid her court. Indeed, she flattered all the ladies of the house with the assurance that she wished to be the spokesman of their will with Barakah, and went to them for orders every day.

The only person whom she feared was Yûsuf Bey, though she had known him from a child. At the first hint of his approach she fled the house. In vain did Barakah assure her he had no objection to her presence — nay, had said more than once that he would like to see her. The old creature smiled and wriggled, "May our Lord preserve him!" but fled no less. It all came of her desire for surreptitiousness. She would not have felt well in a harîm of which the lord approved of her.

Contentment grew in Barakah from day to day, and as the months wore on she lost the wish to go abroad. The young Muhammad could now run about, although he sometimes tumbled and set up a howl. He had been taught to testify to his religion in a piping voice and screamed at visitors, "There is no God but God. Muhammad is the apostle of God"; for which they blessed him. He had also learnt to curse the infidels ferociously. A turbulent and wilful child, his mother and old Umm ed-Dahak thought him perfect. They never tired

of watching him torment the slave-girls. "Ma sh'Allah!" the Mother of Laughter would croak rapturously. "A blusterer, by the Most High! A boy with all the signs of manhood on him! In sh'Allah, he will live to bully grown-up men!"

Occasionally Barakah paid visits as in duty bound; but she much preferred to stay indoors, to smoke and dream and talk with Umm ed-Dahak. Her husband, by his father's influence, obtained a post of some importance, necessitating their removal shortly to a proper house, with a selamlik of its own where he could see his courtiers. Barakah looked forward to the change with high indifference, though Umm ed-Dahak strove to waken her enthusiasm, crying: "Thou wilt now have eunuchs and a carriage of thy very own. In sh'Allah, Yûsuf Bey will go on rising till thy pomp excels the dignity of mighty queens."

Her life could hardly be more easy, she considered; she was quite content. The Pasha's ladies would be grieved to lose her, and she would feel quite lost apart from them. She thought they all respected and admired her.

It was therefore a great shock to her when one afternoon Murjânah Khânum sent for her and read her a kind lecture on her way of life.

"My pearl," she said, "I am the head of this harîm and in some sort responsible for all its members. I do not see a slave degenerating without endeavouring to stop the process by a word of warning.

How much greater is my duty towards a near relation! My flower, thou art an Englishwoman and we Turks of Europe and of Asia welcomed thee to El Islâm as our own sister. We looked to thee for force of character, for the light of education, for refinement. What has happened, on the contrary? Thou shunnest us for boon companions, persons of the country, who, however estimable, are inferior. Amînah Khânum yesterday complained that thou art growing a fellâhah both in speech and conduct. I do not hold with her, I only tell thee what she said — a thing I cannot bear to hear of my dear daughter. My child, I speak in tenderness. Give thought to higher things — our holy Faith, the dignity of life — and spend not all thy time in mere frivolity. Keep that old woman in her place; I say not shun her, since she is amusing. Frequent good houses, study holy books. To spend one's whole life in the hot room of the bath is not existence."

Barakah was deeply hurt. To have her harmless pleasures so severely criticised was as cruel as to see a flower destroyed by hail. She could not take the lofty standpoint of the Turkish lady. Had she done so, viewing life in all its horror, she would have gone mad. How could she bear to look upon herself, the renegade? She was now glad that she was soon to leave that hateful house.

When she told Umm ed-Dahak of her grief, expecting sympathy, the latter smiled and said:

"The right is with her. We must not neglect the

things divine. I will myself instruct thee in them, having some small learning. In sh'Allah, I will teach thee to endure those thoughts which now appal thee."

Instruction of that kind was needed two days later, when Barakah was driven to her new abode. As she alighted from her carriage at the door, some men in waiting cut the throat of a live buffalo by way of compliment. Blood spurted in her path across the threshold.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Blood," explained Umm ed-Dahak, "is but the juice of living creatures. Had they crushed a fruit before thee, would thy Grace have shrunk or fainted? Those servants sacrificed a thing of value in thy name and scattered blood upon the threshold to bring thee good luck. The flesh of the victim was distributed among the needy, as an almsdeed to the credit of the house of Yûsuf Bey. There are those among the learned who declare such practices to be against religion. Allah knows! Blood is the life of creatures, and a precious offering; and our traditions say that it is wise to shed it upon great occasions. Do but apply thy mind, and thou shalt learn to view such sacrifices with a sort of pleasure. It is true, by Allah! There is a thrill peculiar to the sight of blood."

To this and many kindred exhortations Barakah replied with shudders. She was downright ill. At last, perceiving her repugnance to be quite invincible, the old woman resigned that branch of her instruction to the Most High, and once more proffered only what she knew would please her. Observing, also, her disgust at the sight of blind, diseased, or crippled persons, numbers of whom frequented the

harîm in quest of alms, she prevented such from entering her presence.

To gain some credit with Murjânah Khânum, Umm ed-Dahak went and told her, "My sweet lady is too frail. The weakness of the infidels still clings to her. She cannot put her trust in God as we do, but is harassed by the thought of pain and illness. I have tried in vain to win her to a better mind."

"Leave that to Allah!" was the saint's reply. "All that I ask of her is to frequent her equals, and not seclude herself in low frivolity."

"To hear is to obey," bowed Umm ed-Dahak.

She forthwith set to work to school her mistress in all the courtesies expected of a noble lady. She coached her for her visits, teaching her the names of all the male relations, after whom it was the custom to inquire although she could not know them, together with the private history of each lady of the house.

With such a commentator at her elbow, Barakah found amusement in her social duties. Amînah Khânum was as kind to her as ever, but made no secret of her disapproval of the life she led.

"I know," she said, "that thou must feel bewildered sometimes. Our life here is so different from that of Europe. It is natural for one who has left much behind to seek forgetfulness in little pleasures. But why with vulgar natives of the country? Why not with us, who are more civilised and have a nobler view of El Islâm? Thou art not the only

European to be found among us. I have asked some others here to meet thee, and rid thee of the sense of loneliness, which must be dreadful."

She had in truth collected half a dozen other European women who had married Muslims and assumed the veil. But Barakah, instead of being pleased to meet them, seemed annoyed. They came from Italy and Southern Austria. To be ranked with them aroused her English pride. When Amînah Khânum asked why she disdained them, she replied that they were women of the lowest class and doubtful character.

"It is unlawful to say that," the princess scolded. "Such scorn is not permitted here among us. A woman is invested with her husband's honour. It is a sin to cast up what she did before her marriage. Thy boast is simply thou wast better guarded. Praise God for that, but do not scorn those others!"

Barakah loved them none the more for this rebuke.

In her new dwelling she had three reception-rooms. The gilt salon was kept for very ceremonious visitors. Her intimates were welcomed in a large apartment with cushioned dais and divans round the wall, where she herself was wont to sit with Umm ed-Dahak, though sometimes they would camp upon the house-top under sunshades.

All kinds of suitors came to the selamlik to see Yûsuf; and most of these brought presents, some of which were left at the haramlik entrance to bespeak

the intercession of the lady. Ghandûr was made the steward of the house; he and his wife, who still attended on Muhammad, inhabiting a room close by. Barakah was glad to hear his voice again. As a relative by milk, he was allowed sometimes to kiss her hand and raise his chant of honour in her presence.

The winter following her change of residence Barakah was once more brought to bed. The whole household had been praying for another boy: Muhammad had been taught to lisp, "A boy, in sh'Allah!" every time he saw his mother. Umm ed-Dahak had desired her mistress might produce boys only, because, she said, some of the brood were sure to die, and were all boys there was less likelihood of being left with girls alone, like Leylah Khânum. But a girl it proved to be. Muhammad shook his little fist at the intruder, shouting, "Daughter of a dog, who bade thee enter?" There was little joy at her reception in the world, and that little raised to cheer the mother's spirits.

"It is no matter," chuckled Umm ed-Dahak, whose optimism triumphed over every obstacle. "A girl comes not amiss; she has her uses. Since some are bound to die in early childhood, it is as well in every family to have a few who can be spared. And Yûsuf Bey will thank thee for this gift. The fathers always like to have a girl or two."

"Why should some die? In sh'Allah, both of mine will be preserved!" wailed Barakah.

"In sh'Allah! Yet if all the children born were to survive, there soon would not be room to move in our great houses. For example, take the palace of our lord the Pasha, thy good father. Let me see!" She sat in thought and counted on her fingers: "Murjânah Khânum bore him twenty at the least — all dead; Fitnah Khânum more than that — say thirty — of whom six alive. The mother of Ali — she that was a slave — ten at the least, three living. Then there was another concubine . . ."

"Stop, stop! It is not true! It cannot be," cried Barakah, with a hysteric laugh.

But Umm ed-Dahak answered, "True, wallahi. What dismays thee? A woman's task is to produce. We leave the rest to Allah."

And to console her hearer she went on to tell of broods of thirty, even forty, reared successfully; when Barakah's dismay was turned to laughter.

In her moments of depression she was haunted by two terrors on her son's account. One was ophthalmia, a disease so prevalent in Egypt that half the population was composed of blind and one-eyed persons. The other was the plague, of which the women told grim stories with a strange complacency. Many of her friends had been through epidemics of the pestilence and, by their own report, had known no panic. It was a swift and cruel illness, by which they had lost dear ones in despite of careful nursing; it was from Allah; no one's thinking could avert or cure it. The horror the mere thought of it inspired

in Barakah, her futile worry, filled them with a placid wonder.

She had made up her mind that, if the plague drew near, she would carry off her boy to Europe, having no doubt but she could win consent from Yûsuf. But she said nothing of this resolution to the women, knowing they would deem it godless. As a preventative against ophthalmia, she bathed her son's eyes with cold water twice a day, and gave orders for the flies that settled on them to be brushed away — a thing the slaves would not have thought of doing on their own initiative.

The plague did not come near her; and Muhammad's eyes continued bright and liquid under long black lashes. An enemy, unfeared as unexpected, struck her joy.

About the period when he was being weaned, Muhammad had a serious illness. An Armenian doctor was called on, who said, "It is the fever." At that the women wailed and prayed to Allah. The foe was too well known, the scourge of children. There was no need to tell them what to do.

"It carries off a host of infants every year," said Umm ed-Dahak. "But be not downcast, O beloved. God is great! Many survive, and those who do recover are free from its malignancy for evermore."

The malady was typhoid fever, or so like it that Barakah could not detect the slightest difference. She had been often told that it did not attack the

natives of the land, but only Europeans, who were thought more delicate. Here, then, was the reason. The natives who grew up were all inoculated, having been through the disease in infancy.

Muhammad lived, for which his mother gave wild thanks to Allah, and performed a hundred alms-deeds she had vowed in her suspense. But a year later her small daughter died of the same scourge, and in the after years she lost five children by it.

CHAPTER XXV

Her boy was her delight in life. No other woman was allowed to scold him. When Yûsuf slapped him in the cause of order, which happened often, for the child was naughty, she made it up to him with sugar-plums and fond caresses. In his father's absence Muhammad was the lord of the harîm; all vied to please him. His foster-mother and the servants told him fairy stories in which good children killed all kinds of monsters. One, which he never tired of hearing, ended thus:

"Then little Hâfiz took a sword and reaped the head of the atrocious ghoul; and beat to death the hag who had ill-used him, and with the help of all the neighbours, who acclaimed his goodness, burnt all his wicked little cousins in a cheerful fire."

He knew that tale by heart and went about repeating it. He had a lot of toys, but none which gave him so much pleasure as a little cane. With this he beat the slave-girls, uttering terrific curses. The victims, for his satisfaction, made believe to cry, and assured him they were seriously injured. His mother and old Umm ed-Dahak praised his manly spirit.

Fitnah Khânum sometimes shook her head and

spoke of necessary discipline. Barakah only smiled; as she did also, when young Na'imah, puffed up with pride of her new motherhood, exclaimed: "By Allah, I will bring up my son otherwise." But when the prim and dainty Turkish ladies looked fastidious, glancing around her room where toys lay scattered, she felt angry. The salon of those ladies were maintained in spotless cleanness; their children, though untidy to avert ill-fortune, were as courtly as small chamberlains towards their elders.

"It is strange! Thou art an Englishwoman, yet thou likest these things!" Amînah Khânum exclaimed once, remarking her affection for a certain sweet-stuff, common in the markets but unknown in decent houses — a taste she had acquired through Umm ed-Dahak. "Thou art too much with the women of the country. Be more discerning in the choice of friends."

But Barakah was happy as she was; or, if not altogether happy, chose to seem so from a blend of pride and indolence. Against the condescension of the Turkish ladies she armed her dignity with the reflection that she was born above all Eastern women. Yet she dared not let remembrance dwell on England for fear of terrible misgivings she had sworn to banish. Her boy, she thought, should be her vindication. He was visibly superior to other children of the land.

To him, clasped tightly to her breast, she poured out all her secret and tormenting thoughts.

The English had ill-treated her most shamefully. Her son must hate the English for her sake. And yet he must remember he was half an Englishman, a being of a different order from the children round him. And when he prayed he must ask Allah to increase his strength and wisdom, so that he might prove a match for any Englishman he might encounter in the course of life. The child, with bright eyes, drank in all she said, but God alone knew what his mind could make of it; for Barakah's opinions were a tangle as of angry serpents, their utterance as incoherent as the cries of battle. She heard him once hurl "Englishwoman!" at a slave who had enraged him. The girl laughed back: "Thy mother is an Englishwoman," when he replied: "A noble race and warlike — the Muslimîn among them, like my mother. But thou art a low Christian of that race, a filthy harlot!"

Outside her own house and her husband's family Barakah's chief friends were Gulbeyzah and Bedr-ul-Budûr. With them she laid aside the pride which had become her usual armour in society. Yet Gulbeyzah said one day when Barakah was calling on her: "How thou art changed! Rememberest thou the days when we talked French together? Then thou wast as timid and demure as mice are; and so good and wise! Now thou art a high and mighty Arab lady. I am half afraid!"

"Thou too art greatly changed, O wicked joker!" cried Barakah, impounding the Circassian's hand.

"Rememberest thou the little window in the passage?"

"Hush!" said Gulbeyzah, with uplifted finger. "By Allah, thou art owner of a shameless memory. But come with me!"

She led her friend away from the reception-room, upstairs, and showed her such another little window as that they both remembered, looking out on distant roofs. "I come and dream here sometimes as of old — I, the mother of two children!" sighed Gulbeyzah. "There is a roof well fitted for a hopeless lover, but no one ever comes. Now thou knowest that I have not changed my foolish nature, although in motherhood I have acquired a soul."

That the Turkish ladies rather wondered at her preference for Gulbeyzah and Bedr-ul-Budûr, two former slaves, made Barakah the more enamoured of their friendship. Muhammad was allowed to visit them, and play games with their children, a transcendent favour; and it was with a horror as of treason and of base ingratitude that she heard them, too, declare that he was sadly spoilt.

It was at the wedding-feast which Tâhir, the great singer, gave his daughter. The ladies of the grand harîms flocked thither eagerly, for it was known that Tâhir would perform. The two Circassians found out Barakah amid the throng, and went and sat with her in a deserted corner. Muhammad had that day been playing with the children of Gulbeyzah's house.

"He is a little tyrant!" said his hostess, laugh-

ing. "A young savage. He attacked my little girl as if to kill her, because she tried to get back her own doll. I had to shake him. I told him that his mother would be very angry at his conduct. He cursed my religion and then spat at me. By our lady Zeynab, thou shouldst beat him sometimes, O my soul!"

"His spirit is too high and needs restraining. Every one says so," said Bedr-ul-Budûr.

"You must have thwarted him. He is not used to it. He has the noblest, the most generous nature," answered Barakah.

"By Allah, it is difficult not to thwart a boy who claims the eyes from out one's face as his to play with! He must be denied, and when denied he grows infuriated," said Gulbeyzah mildly.

Barakah was on the point of making a fierce answer, when the glorious voice of Tâhir rose, compelling silence. She had heard a hundred singers, male and female, since she came to Cairo; but Tâhir's voice alone had power to move her. The others mouthed and shrieked to individual passions; but Tâhir took the soul and soared with it, producing exaltation and sense of peace. He sang from the pure heart of El Islâm, and shed its fervent calm on all who heard him. When the song died she had forgotten anger.

That wedding-feast became for ever memorable by reason of a shocking tragedy at its conclusion. Barakah and her friends were led by Umm ed-

Dahak, who was a relative of Tâhir's wife, to view the nuptial chamber. It was full of flowering plants; the bed, with silken coverings, was quite embowered. In addition to the odour of so many blossoms the air was thick with perfumes burnt and sprinkled. The room, they were informed, had been arranged, the flowers provided, by rich admirers of the singer's talent.

"By Allah, pretty! But I should not like to sleep there!" had been Gulbeyzah's comment, little guessing what would happen. For next morning it was known to high and low, through all the city, that the bridegroom and the bride had died of suffocation. When people went to rouse them in the morning they found corpses. The news was brought to Barakah by Umm ed-Dahak, who had herself been present at the sad discovery. She told the story with an artist's relish.

"What did Tâhir do? The poor demented father? What did he? He took his lute and struck the chords and sang a song more mournful than was ever heard on earth till now. Many present had to leave the room in grievous pains. And then, with the last note — C-r-r-a-c-k! — he broke the lute, and swore the binding oath that he would never sing again. In sh'Allah he will change his mind," said Umm ed-Dahak, in her ordinary tone. "The world would lack a soul without his singing. His oath has spread despair through all the town."

For months the news of Tâhir was demanded

eagerly. After his daughter's death he went to Tantah for a while. Returning to the capital, prepared to keep his vow, he took a shop and furnished it with goods, intending to become a merchant. He thought to work out bargains over cups of coffee, by way of pastime only, for he was a wealthy man. But the people, his admirers, would not have it. They thronged his shop directly it was opened, and bought up all his goods in a few hours, paying the price first asked without a protest. He stocked his shop again; the same thing happened, till, finding himself debarred from occupation, he cursed the day when he was born; and in the end repaired to the Grand Câdi, and asked for liberation from his vow. The reverend judge released him with a grin and "Praise to Allah!" It was what his Honour and the whole of Egypt had been wanting. Enormous crowds assembled to hear Tâhir call to noonday prayer at the great mosque El Azhar — the first occasion of his singing since his daughter's death.

"The praise to Allah, we possess him once again," said Umm ed-Dahak, when reporting his defeat. "It has cost us trouble to regain him, Allah knows. He did wrong to swear that oath; which was as impious as swearing to cut off his hand or foot, the work of God; and so the Câdi told him in his judgment yesterday. He brought the grief upon himself by doting on the girl above her merits, calling her his soul of music, neglecting the son who is still with him — a fine lad. By the Prophet, it was court-

ing sorrow to make all that fuss about a daughter. Now had it been his son, his source of honour ——"

Barakah interrupted with a prayer to Allah to avert the omen of her stabbing fear. She clutched Muhammad to her bosom; but he, intent on playthings, kicked and struggled, even swore at her. And at that moment Fitnah Khânum was announced.

CHAPTER XXVI

When Fitnah Khânum entered, the small boy was stamping about on the dais, hurling frightful imprecations at his mother, who was on her knees endeavouring to soothe him. His fez was off, and he had trampled on it in his rage; he tore his clothing. Umm ed-Dahak, crouching by the wall with her nargileh, made clucking noises to attract the child; while the wife of Ghandûr, standing, smiled upon the scene, awaiting the command to bear him off. The floor was littered with his broken playthings. The light that filtered in through the rich lattice was blue with all the dust that he had raised.

"Look, here comes thy grandmother, a great lady. Hush, O Muhammad! Be a good boy. I will give thee such nice sweeties."

"Mayest thou be ravished and then cut in pieces!" shrieked Muhammed, knuckling both his eyes. Therewith he spurned his mother with his foot.

The visitor remained a moment petrified. It was the first time she had seen her grandson at his worst. Then, boxing both ears of the wife of Ghandûr, who stood grinning near her, she rushed upon the wicked boy, and slapped him hard, regardless of his kicks and blows, his horrid language.

"Learn to respect thy mother, little malefactor," she admonished him, enforcing every word with punishment. "Thou art no better than a heathen, than a wild beast. Thou wilt merit fire hereafter!"

But Barakah sprang on her like a tigress. "He is my child! Let him alone!" she panted.

"He is thy child, truly, but a Muslim first. To curse and kick his mother is a dreadful crime."

"Let him alone, I say! By Allah, no one shall chastise my son but me, his mother!"

The ladies, both alike indignant, screamed against each other; Umm ed-Dahak, ever ready to applaud a truth, however adverse, begged her mistress to hear wisdom from the mouth of Fitnah Khânum; the wife of Ghandûr was in tears, and all the slave-girls, assembling in the hope to see a fight, shrieked prayers to Allah and implored the ladies to be calm. Muhammad, in disgust at being quite forgotten, set up a dismal howl, which no one heeded.

At length, perceiving the futility of further argument, the visitor retired, by no means vanquished.

"The child must be removed if thou wilt not control him," were her parting words, unheard of any one amid the din.

In the greatest agitation and distress of mind, Fitnah Khânum went back to her carriage and was driven home. She sought immediate audience of Murjânah Khânum. She had a warm affection for the wife of Yûsuf, and something like a passion for her little grandson. The need to take stern meas-

ures with them filled her eyes with tears; but her religion nerved her to perform a duty. A scene like that she had just witnessed must never be allowed to be repeated in a Muslim house.

Murjânah's look grew worried as she learned the story.

"I have spoken to the dear one once, and fain would never speak to her again in chiding tones," she murmured. "I pity her extremely, for she is alone among us and, I think, afraid. Consider what might have become of one of us if set down all alone amid the life of Europe! But it devolves on us to intervene since Yûsuf, as thou sayest, will not act against her."

As a result of Fitnah's allegations, Murjânah Khânum called a council of the matrons of the family, including in the number her ex-slave, Gulbeyzah, who, as Barakah's best friend, might plead her cause. But Gulbeyzah, when the case was laid before her, shrugged and cried:

"By Allah, it is true, she will destroy the child! How often have I tried to warn her! But she is haughty in her weakness, and impatient of advice. She loves the fawning voice of her own servants. She has greatly changed. Yûsuf Bey, however, is for discipline. She has more than once complained to me of his severity towards the boy."

"What good is that when she consoles Muhammad afterwards, and talks about his cruel father. I have heard her," put in Na'imah, who was a mem-

ber of the conclave, though a child in years. She spoke with great excitement. All the ladies smiled. Murjânah Khânum touched her cheek affectionately, and called her the most excellent of little mothers. Murjânah added:

"The whole trouble, as I see it, is her want of faith. She has lost the comfort of her own religion, without acquiring ours in more than name. Is such a woman, full of cowardice and self-indulgence, fit to rear a Muslim? Unless she change her whole behaviour, which appears unlikely, for her strength is gone, will it be wise to leave the child with her?"

"No!" came from all sides.

"Let his grandmother take charge of him," said Leylah Khânum.

"God forbid!" cried Fitnah, "lest his mother hate me. Let him be given to the wisest, most benign of women, to our dear Murjânah."

This motion won applause from all the ladies on the divan. They smiled to one another with rouged lips and kohled eyes. The room was beautifully cool and sweet, the cigarettes were of the best, the coffee excellent, and every one enjoyed the sense of doing serious business.

Murjânah showed no fear of the responsibility. Assured of Fitnah Khânum's gracious help, she said the task of civilising the small boy would not displease her; but first the menfolk had to be consulted, and due warning must be given to the luckless mother. The ladies Fitnah, Leylah, and Murjânah

were deputed to convey the verdict of the council to the Pasha and to Yûsuf Bey, who were invited to Murjânah's rooms that evening.

Yûsuf displayed some irritation when he heard the charges.

"But my wife is a Frank!" he cried. "Allah knows it is but natural her ways should be different from ours."

Murjânah took no notice of the interruption, but proceeded to relate the scene described by Fitnah. She mentioned also facts which he could not gainsay, as that Muhammad never kissed his father's hand, that he sat down in his father's presence without asking leave, and that he did not wait upon his parents as behooved a child. Yûsuf was silenced, though he looked annoyed. The Pasha wore his blandest diplomatic visage.

"With thy permission, O my lord," said the great lady, "we have thought upon this matter and discussed it fully. If it be allowed for us to proffer a suggestion, it is that thou, who didst endow the bride of Yûsuf and stand in some sort for her people at the wedding, shouldst of thy gracious favour go and reason with her."

The Pasha, fingering his beads, observed that God is merciful.

"Of thy kindness condescend to view the case," she urged. "The boy is brought up utterly devoid of reverence. What is his fate when he goes out to face the world — unmannerly, rebellious, a mad dog,

a savage, detestable alike to great and small. Of what use will he be to El Islâm? Oh, God forbid that he should grow like that — a scourge to his two parents, and the scorn of others. It is to save him and his mother from the consequences of her folly that we beg thee of thy mercy to remonstrate with her, and if she will not hearken, to confide the education of the child to us. The word is spoken. May our Lord preserve thee ever!"

"May Allah help us all!" replied the Pasha gently.

When he and Yûsuf had departed from the ladies and were returning through dim corridors to the selamlik, he inquired:

"What sayest thou?"

"They much exaggerate," said Yûsuf warmly. "I keep an eye upon the boy. In course of time I shall correct his conduct."

"Do it now!"

"What meanest thou? Why dost thou smile, my father?"

"I smile because I have observed that when the women take that tone —'of thy great kindness deign to listen,' and the rest, there is no safe course for man but to obey. The boy is five years old and it is time he learnt behaviour. It is thy business, O my son; remonstrate with her."

"Nay, for they charged thee with the office."

"It is thine of right."

"Very gladly I resign it to thee. Thy words

have more weight. And how can I turn round upon her suddenly? She will think me mad."

"By Allah, I implore thee to perform thy duty."

"By the Prophet, I beseech, adjure thee to befriend me now, as thou hast done from childhood. I will tell her to expect a visit from thee in the morning."

"Well, God is greatest!" The good Pasha heaved a sigh, proclaiming his acceptance of the part allotted.

Accordingly, next morning, arrayed in his official black frock-coat and newest fez, he waited upon Barakah, who received him with delight, evidently unsuspecting the real purpose of his visit. He thought that Yûsuf might at least have warned her. However, with a shrug, he opened business in his usual courtly and confiding manner, speaking in French, since servants are born eavesdroppers.

"Madame my daughter," he began, "from the moment when you did my house the honour of espousing my dear son, I have been your servant and admirer; that is known. Yûsuf himself has not more tender veneration for your many virtues and accomplishments, so rare among us." He went on to recite the panegyric of her general conduct as a wife and mother, paid tribute to her beauty and her piety, and then said, "But there is one small point on which I have to scold you. In your great goodness, your untiring kindness, you forget to claim the service due to you. Your slaves, as I have heard, grow

fat and lazy, and though devoted to you — as what soul would not be? — do not keep your house so scrupulously clean and nicely ordered as the dwelling-place of such a treasure ought to be. I beg you to make hard your heart from time to time, to think a little less for others and more often for yourself. Even your own son should be brought up to reverence you, as one to whom he owes incalculable debts of gratitude. He should kiss your hand whenever he approaches, and bow and ask your blessing when he takes his leave. It is our custom for small children and, I think, a good one. How is the little one this morning? Am I not to be allowed to see him for one moment?"

Barakah clapped her hands and, when a slave appeared, gave order for Muhammad to be brought. He came in presently, escorted by his foster-mother, who stood and watched his progress to the dais with loving smiles. He was in docile mood, and Barakah detained him, giving the wife of Ghandûr leave to go.

"What fault is there to find in his behaviour?" she inquired in French, with arch defiance of the Pasha.

"None in the world," he made reply, with vast politeness, "except that he has not kissed hands, nor waited your permission to sit down with us."

"Absurd!" laughed Barakah.

"Absurd, in verity, like many of our customs. Only, my cherished daughter, he is one of us and

must observe them. If you refuse to teach him the behaviour which we consider fitting for young children, I announce with deep regret that we must take him from you."

Barakah gasped. She looked for signs of jesting; but the Pasha's visage, though urbane, was serious.

"It has been told me," he continued very gravely, "that this boy, when angry, kicks and curses his own mother. That is, for us others, a most dreadful crime, apart from the regard in which I hold you personally. My grandson must not be brought up to shame our house; the authority of the family must be exerted to avert dishonour. In fact, dear madame, if you will not punish him, he must be given for a while to some one who will do so."

"But it is unheard of!" cried the mother wildly. "How can you think of such abominable cruelty? He is my child. My right to him exists in nature."

"And is inalienable," said the Pasha, with a splendid bow. "No one else can ever bear him, but some one else will have to educate him, since madame refuses."

"I am an Englishwoman. I shall complain to my Consul."

"Believe me, dear madame, he will not listen. Your son is a Turkish subject; we inhabit Egypt; and in a case of this sort we allow no interference. The English are a race distinguished for intelligence

and force of character, I beg you to display those qualities on this occasion."

He left her in hysterics, clinging fiercely to her boy.

CHAPTER XXVII

No sooner was the Pasha gone than Umm ed-Dahak crept back softly to her mistress and cooed of consolation in her ear. Muhammad, who had started howling out of sympathy, she told to go and play with Ghandûr's son.

"By Allah, it is all my fault, not thine," she whispered. "I ought to have foreseen this grief and warned thee. Vex not thy soul at all! It is no matter! Praise be to Allah, we can change our policy. To-morrow thou wilt beat thy son a little, and all the world will praise thy management."

But the mother's tears were flowing less from sense of guilt than for the helplessness, the lack of energy, which she discovered in herself at such a crisis. The call to make an effort paralysed her; she hung on Umm ed-Dahak like a frightened child, agreeing with loud sobs to the old woman's statement that on the morrow they would make a new beginning.

That afternoon the little boy had been invited to Gulbeyzah's house. His mother being too unwell to bear him company, he started off on foot in the custody of Ghandûr. Barakah adjured him to be very

good and mind his manners, on which he kissed her with a most angelic smile.

"See how obedient and how good he is!" she wailed, her anguish breaking out afresh when he was gone. "How can they say he is not well brought up?"

"Without a doubt they have been misinformed," cooed Umm ed-Dahak. "They have mistaken some exceptional disorder for his general conduct. Ma sh'Allah! With but a touch of discipline, a very little teaching of good manners, thou wilt make him glorious, a pattern to all other children of this age."

But Muhammad, who had set forth as an angel, returned a little devil, in a sullen rage. He would not speak a word, refused all nourishment, and sat aloof with frowning brows and gnashing teeth. Ghandûr, who brought him home, had sent in word that he had been a naughty boy and needed punishment. So Ghandûr also was his mother's enemy.

Muhammad struck at all the women who came near him. He swore by the Most High to ravish every one of them, to tear their eyes out and cut off their hands and feet. The servants laughed at his ferocious impotence, which made things worse. When his mother came and knelt beside him, he at first repelled her; but after half an hour's incessant coaxing she elicited his cause of grief.

He had been pretending in his play to kill Gulbeyzah's little girl—"not really hurting her," he blubbered, "though she shrieked like a dying

fowl"— when all at once, without the slightest provocation, a big boy assailed him, flung him down and knelt upon him, pinning his two hands. While he was in that position the ladies of the harîm had come in and reviled him, praising his cruel persecutor as a hero. They had then conveyed him, kicking, to Ghandûr, who, like the beast he was, believed their lies.

"It is no matter, O beloved! Dry thy tears! Never — never shalt thou visit that unfriendly house again," his mother whispered.

Muhammad hiccuped on a sob, "Wallahi!" and fell again to gnashing of his teeth and moaning.

"See!" murmured Umm ed-Dahak. "See his dauntless spirit! By Allah, it is true, he must be tamed a little."

That night he cried himself to sleep, and in the morning was snappish and morose, with furtive eyes. About the fourth hour of the day his mother missed him, and having sought through all the house in vain, conceived grave fears. She sent a eunuch to the Pasha's palace, while Ghandûr cried the tidings through the quarter. Distraught with grief, she ran from room to room in the hottest hours of the day, always expecting to find Muhammad hiding somewhere. At last she sank down on a couch, exhausted.

The third hour after noon, as she was lying thus, Gulbeyzah and her durrahs were announced. They entered with much tragic exclamation. Then the truth was known. Muhammad had repaired that

morning to their house and joined the children's games, appearing friendly. But he was only waiting for his chance of vengeance; for, luring Gulbeyzah's little girl apart, he stabbed her with a dagger he had got — the Lord knew how! — and cried to her big brother, "Thy account, O tyrant!"

His victim — praise to Allah — was not killed; nor even, by His mercy, maimed for life; but the ensuing uproar in the house may be imagined. The murderous child had been imprisoned in a room apart; the lord of the harîm, when summoned, had sent at once for Yûsuf Bey, who was even now examining the culprit. Directly the responsibility had been lifted off them, they (the ladies) had flown straight to Barakah to assure her of their unimpaired affection. But — merciful Allah! — what was the world coming to? They sought refuge in Allah from such revengeful fury in so small a child.

"You must have used him very cruelly," the mother cried. "He is by nature the most generous of children, not a criminal!"

At that, all four began to talk at once. Barakah talked against them, and the slave-girls and dependants, looking on, raised cries. The argument was at its height when Yûsuf was announced. The din ceased instantly. The four Circassians raised their mouth-veils in alarm and slipped away; the servants, silenced, went into another room.

Yûsuf entered, stern of countenance, dragging by the arm the peccant boy, whose mouth hung open,

while his eyes stared wildly, fixed in the imbecility of abject fear.

Barakah fell down at her husband's feet and screamed for mercy. He was obdurate.

"Let be, O woman!" he commanded. "My child, as trained by thee, is now a malefactor. He robs and kills; he breaks the law of hospitality. He stole a weapon from Ghandûr, his foster-father, and with it stabbed a little girl, whose guest he was. Henceforth I take him from thee, and give him to my mothers to be educated. Seek not to counteract their efforts, or by the Ca'abah I will beat thee soundly as I now beat him."

With that, he marched his son into an inner room, whence presently there issued sounds of blows and bitter wailing. Barakah ground her face upon the floor and stopped her ears.

Muhammad, by his father's orders, was shut off from her that night; and the next morning, before Yûsuf went to business, the Pasha's harîm carriage came to fetch the child. The eunuch brought a letter from Murjânah Khânum, inviting Barakah to come and give her counsel. But Barakah's sole answer was an angry cry.

For several days she would not budge from her own rooms, refused to see the Pasha's ladies when they called, and persisted, notwithstanding every argument, in posing as the victim of most foul injustice. And Umm ed-Dahak coaxed and soothed her all that while. At length, one day, Murjânah

Khânum entered, unannounced; and Barakah, in act to rise and make indignant protest, was silenced by the sight of her own child.

"Go, O Muhammad, do what I have told thee," said the old lady, with her hand on the boy's shoulder. Whereat Muhammad went up gravely and bowed over his mother's hand to kiss it, but she caught him in her arms, preventing him. He called out to Murjânah Khânum that it was not fair, and struggled to get free. She put him down, when he went on with his polite performance, kissed her hand and pressed his forehead to it, inquired after her health and asked her blessing; and then in the most courtly Arabic asked what he had done that one of his parents, who were dearer to him than all living creatures, should punish him by five days of avoidance.

"The harîm of my grandfather, Muhammad Pasha Sâlih, depute me to request that thou wilt honour us this day and every day with thy most gracious presence, O my mother."

Before the termination of this speech and ceremony, Barakah was lying on her face in tears. She had thought, through the long hours of deprivation, that they were teaching her own child to disregard, if not to hate her. The relief was great. Murjânah sat beside her and caressed her, while Muhammad, standing reverently, looked concerned.

They took her with them in the carriage to the Pasha's house, where, instead of reprobation, she met boundless sympathy. The ladies Fitnah and

Murjânah told her all that had been done for the small boy, with evident anxiety for her approval. Muhammad showed her all the harîm pets. He bade a slave-girl bring his own white doves. She brought three in her bosom. At his call, they flew to him and settled on his head and shoulders. There dwelt a parrot in the house of Na'imah, a monkey in the house of Fitnah Khânum, which she had to visit; as well as roving cats, and little birds in cages, and several street-dogs who came round for food. He also showed with pride his plot of garden, consisting of a box of scented herbs. And all the while that she was in the house, he waited on her like a page, kissing her hand whenever he could get a chance, and telling her the joy he felt in seeing her. When, left alone with him, she strove to whisper consolation, he shook his head decidedly, and told her: "O my mother, I have learnt to know that I was very wicked. Thou wast ever much too gentle and too kind with me. Allah knows how much I love thee — my grandmothers have taught me that — but it is well that I should be removed from thee a while and brought to reverence. It is not right that one so delicate as thou art should have a rough, ill-mannered boy to vex thee."

He loved her more than ever, it appeared, but thought her not much wiser than himself.

Her fear of the stern rules of El Islâm was tamed by reverence.

"By Allah, they are like the string and we the

beads," said Umm ed-Dahak, holding up a rosary to point her meaning. "Thirty-three beads of no intrinsic worth. If scattered, useless and soon lost. If strung together, a comely instrument of praise to God."

Barakah watched Muhammad with humility; not jealous of the change which had been wrought by others, but choosing to regard it as a miracle direct from Heaven. His pride, once wayward, now was focused on his coming manhood. He told her all his thoughts, which seemed to her most wise. He waited on her hand and foot when in her presence. Yet in this deference there was a touch of condescension which was absent from the honour which he paid to Yûsuf. His father was his sovereign, she his tender care. Such wisdom in so small a child appeared miraculous. She worshipped his perfections while he bowed before her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At seven years old Muhammad went to school. It was customary for the scions of great houses to be taught at home by private tutors, but the family council had decreed that so exceptional a child must feel the yoke of public discipline and mix with other boys as soon as possible. The school, just founded by the widow of a former ruler, was reckoned modern, for the simple reason that the scholars learnt geography and history, and handled other books as well as the august Corân.

Ghandûr led off Muhammad every morning, and brought him home at evening through the perils of the streets. Barakah's thoughts were with him all day long; she liked to guess at his employment at a given moment; while Umm ed-Dahak painted flattering pictures of his skill in learning, the astonishment of all his masters at his brilliant genius.

When she was driven out to pay her calls, Barakah arranged beforehand with the eunuch that the carriage should pull up before the school. Then through the shutter she would watch the iron screen which filled each window-arch and listen to the drone of children's voices.

The school was an octagonal kiosk of marble, touching the wall of a world-famous mosque. Its salient bulk half throttled an important thoroughfare, forming a narrow strait where traffic battled, and on each side a little bay or backwater where the carriage could draw up without obstruction. There, underneath the windows with their arabesques of iron screen-work, sat street sorcerers with trays of sand before them, venders of sugarcane and slabs of bread and divers nuts; and holy beggars slumbered in the shade. Barakah knew exactly where Muhammad had his seat and, waiting upon that side, watched a certain opening in the iron-work, from which there presently emerged a little hand. It fluttered for a moment and was then withdrawn. She waited for a second signal and a third before she gave the order to drive on.

At school Muhammad's aim was to excel by all means. The counsels of Murjânah Khânum, who used religious and inspiring words, had fired his brain. He had but one ambition now — to please his father. He would prove the best of Muslims, the most zealous, the most learned, and then his father would forget his former wickedness. In pursuance of this end he chafed at every obstacle and was infuriated by stupidity or sloth in others. He beat his foster-brother more than once through mere impatience, and in the end put zeal into that vacant but receptive youth. And Barakah, whose worship of her paragon extended to the son of Ghandûr as his

shadow, became the confidante of all their thoughts and projects.

The report which the headmaster made to Yûsuf Bey after Muhammad's first few weeks at school was satisfactory.

"The boy, thy son," remarked the reverend man, "is highly gifted and extremely diligent. In sh'Allah, he will live to be a light to El Islâm, a glory to this land of Masr, and a worthy slave of the Most High. We have only one small fault to find with his behaviour, which is that, in his eagerness, he answers questions we address to other boys, and is inclined to argue with the teacher as if instruction were for him alone."

His mother was delighted with this verdict, whose one restriction seemed to her the highest praise. She began to cherish visions of his future greatness, and with the aid of Umm ed-Dahak built grand castles in the air.

"In sh'Allah, he will rise to rule in Egypt; he will be the right hand of the Khedive, the chief vizier, the leader of the armies; the sword and shield of El Islâm, the scourge of Allah on the heathen and all infidels."

Thus Umm ed-Dahak, seated on the floor beside her mistress; who, reclining on the dais at ease with her narghileh, removed the amber mouthpiece from her lips to sigh, "In sh'Allah!"

In order to be worthy of her son's magnificence, Barakah had evolved a fine romantic history out of

her own past. The transmutation of that dross to gold took place so naturally that she was not aware of lying when she told her crony that she was of royal birth. Gentility being something inconceivable by Umm ed-Dahak, who knew of no inherited prestige save that of an Emîr, she was obliged, in order to convey the status of a governess, to compare it with the lot of fallen princes. From thence to the invention of a principality was but a step. The remonstrance of the Consul and of Mrs. Cameron against her marriage became the rage of a fanatical and angry nation. The noise of her conversion had disturbed all Europe, and nearly brought on a religious war. Let Umm ed-Dahak ask the Pasha, if she doubted!

But Umm ed-Dahak was not of the kind who doubt. For her, romantic fiction was more worth than fact. She accepted this, as she accepted every tale, artistically, and even added likely details unperceived of Barakah.

The servants came to know the weakness of their mistress and addressed her as "Emîrah" with all kinds of ceremony. The disease was catching; they themselves became infected. With the blacks illusion took the form of demoniacal possession. Each one began to brag of "him who dwells in me," his power and jurisdiction over other demons. Barakah overheard them talking of their inmates, discussing pedigrees and finding out relationships which had existence only in the world of ginn. She once com-

plained of their insanity to Fitnah Khânum, and asked what could be done to put a stop to it.

"I know one cure for devils as for every other illness of unmarried girls, and that is matrimony," was the answer. "Among us here it is a sovereign remedy; among the Franks it seems less efficacious."

"Among the Franks such foolish fancies are unknown," laughed Barakah, when Fitnah Khânum sniffed, but said no more.

"The poor one is herself possessed," she told Murjânah afterwards. "The servants say a princess of the ginn inhabits her; and she complains because they also harbour inmates. She ought to see a proper exorcist."

The ladies all agreed to pity her. But Barakah, unconscious of their criticism, pursued her path of dreams with Umm ed-Dahak.

"May fire consume the infidels who thus dethroned thee, who robbed thee of thy land and honours!" cried the latter. "O day of milk, when thou didst fly for succour to the Muslimîn! They will avenge thy wrongs, in sh'Allah, in the time to come. Thy son shall win his birthright back with fire and sword. . . . Ma sh'Allah! Do I not behold his state? I see him on a throne, with courtiers prone before him — Muhammad Yûsuf Pasha, styled 'the Great'— nay, what say I? — the Emîr, the King Muhammad in virtue of his mother's dignity!" cried Umm ed-Dahak with dilated eyes. "By Allah, the

most splendid scene I ever witnessed! He is Grand Vizier!"

But the downfall of the Khedive's favourite, occurring at this epoch, dashed the ardour of the seers, and caused them in alarm to change their vision. The man, whose pomp had served them for a measure of Muhammad's greatness, disappeared from life. The story ran that, having grown too great, he had been trapped by order of his loving master, accommodated with a weighted sack, and dropped into the Nile. The tidings caused a flutter in the world of women like that of seafarers beholding shipwreck. For the favourite's death involved the ruin of a great harîm, boasting its troupes of dancers and of trained musicians, lavish of entertainment and of gay repute. Its members, far too many to be all beloved, had, some of them, found vent in wild amours which furnished thrilling stories to more lucky women. Now all the slaves were scattered among other houses; the ladies, owning private property, returned to their relations pending further marriage. The great man's children were reduced to mediocrity; his honours and emoluments divided up among a score of courtiers; his name became a byword for pride's fall.

"Wallahi, our beloved must not follow in his steps too closely. Allah forbid!" said Umm ed-Dahak solemnly. And forthwith she began to make another forecast, with frequent "In sh'Allahs" and "Ma sh'Allahs," to rob it of all taint of boastfulness.

"He goes up gently, rousing no suspicion in the ruler, winning the people's voice, as did Muhammad Ali. Then, when the times are ripe, he asks the Sovereign and his courtiers to a banquet and cuts all their throats. Then he ascends the throne and does good deeds, till all men praise the Maker for his rare benevolence. And thou, his mother, wilt reside in splendid state, and when the great ones of the English come with gifts for thee, thou wilt spit upon them and repel them with thy little foot. In sh' Allah!"

Barakah would be a widow in those days, by Allah's mercy. A queen, she would of course have many lovers. Did she desire a man — one word, and he was hers as quick as lightning! And Umm ed-Dahak would be ever at her call to spread the net for goodly youths and guard her secret.

"But I shall be too old by then!" laughed Barakah.

"Please Allah, no!" cried the old woman, a trifle vexed at being brought to earth. "Thou wilt be still quite youthful. See thee now: what beauty, what a youthful figure! By Allah, almost wicked in a mother! Thou dost not grow old."

In fact, her shape, though something fat, was not ungainly, like that of younger women leading the same life. She took no care of it, conforming to the harîm custom for women who bear children to let beauty go. "The time and purpose of the bloom is past, the fruit succeeds, more noble," they assured

her. She saw the rarest beauties, like Bedr-ul-Budûr, already changing into fat old women. Compared with them she felt still young and comely. But when, her carriage rolling on the Gîzah road, she saw real Frankish women, riding, driving, she felt a raddled and unwieldy hag. There was one Englishwoman in particular who often passed her, driving a light dog-cart with a Nubian groom behind—straight as a lance and trim of waist, with rosy cheeks and bright eyes under grizzled hair. A creature of free air and open sunlight, the shuttered, perfumed shade could not produce her like. A jealousy near hatred stirred in Barakah.

One evening Yûsuf, thinking to amuse her, had sent her with his sisters and Muhammad to the new opera-house which the Khedive had built to please the European visitors, and also to provide His Highness with relays of mistresses. There, in a harîm box behind a screen, she smoked cigarettes and listened to what seemed mere senseless screeching to one who had admired the voice of Tâhir. The opera was *Don Giovanni.* Never had she witnessed a performance so stilted, artificial, and absurd. She quite agreed with the remarks of her companions, who, after their first wonder at the building and the lighted stage, yawned openly and called it simple madness. Yet the entertainment was no bad one to the taste of Europe, as she knew from the applause of people in the unscreened boxes, where bare-faced, brilliant women sat and stared about them. The

mere existence of those women there in Cairo, transgressing every native rule of conduct, was an insult. The freshness even of the old ones made her conscious of decay. When the girls after the second act proposed to go, she agreed gladly. Muhammad screamed to stay, and had to be transported bodily by Barakah, while one of his young aunts held her hand upon his mouth. A very small boy at the time, he had supposed the scene was laid in hell, and all the hideous screams of the performers denoted pangs of tortured infidels.

Muhammad, for his mother's sake, abhorred the English; and yet he loved his mother, who was of that race. He reconciled these warring passions by supposing the existence of a race of Muslims in the British Isles.

One day, when he was ten years old, he came home with a face of indignation, demanding, "O my mother, is it not quite true that the English nation is as strong and warlike as the French, and nowise subject to the lord of Paris?"

"True, O my son."

"By Allah, that is what I said. We were arguing, a dozen of us, after school. They all opposed me, stating that the French were much the greater and more civilised. I, sure of my contention, asked a master who stood by. He foolishly asserted that the French were stronger. I informed him of his error in all courtesy, when, to my horror, he began abusing me, detained me in the school an hour against

my will, and himself remained to gloat on my imprisonment.

"Nor is that all. No sooner was I free than I went to the house of the principal and made complaint of the injustice. He said — the malefactor! — thus escaping from the question, that it was a sin for true believers to quarrel for the sake of infidels. I told him there were Muslimîn among the English, as witness my own mother, who is one of them. He had the rudeness to declare thou art a convert. It was all that I could do to keep from plucking at his beard. I shall ask my father to remove me straightway from a school where lying insults and oppression thus prevail."

"Thy principal spoke truth. I am a convert," murmured Barakah, hanging her head through fear of her son's shame.

"Merciful Allah!" cried Muhammad, greatly shocked.

But in a moment he recovered from the blow. Kissing her hand, he murmured fondly:

"Be not downcast, O beloved, it is not thy fault. My comrades sneer at converts; but no matter. I shall still maintain that thou wert born in the right way. Thou art still my dearest mother, loved and honoured."

The lover-like, protecting air became him rarely.

CHAPTER XXIX

News from the world of men reached the harîm like voices from the street without. From time to time some item, interesting them, was cried in tones of censure or approval; but always in a manner of abstraction. This apathy arose from centuries of strict seclusion, in which, through change of dynasties and strife of factions, the privilege of the harîm had been respected. The women felt that politics could not come near them; the government which ruled the men was none of theirs. A realm within the realm, they had their own excitements, their own concerns of life and death and amorous crime. Events the most important failed to move them, while trifling breaches of religion or old custom caused a vast commotion in that nursery of fanaticism.

One day, when Barakah was out driving in her carriage, she was stopped near Abdîn palace by the pressure of excited crowds and heard the sounds of angry tumult. The driver backed the horses and then turned. On reaching home she asked the eunuch of the matter.

He shrugged: "It is the soldiers, O my lady.

They are angry at the coming of the Frank commissioners."

It was then that she presumed to question Yûsuf, and learnt that two commissioners, one French, one English, had come to take control of the finances of the country. The Khedive, that jovial libertine and spendthrift, was now bankrupt. The Europeans, as his creditors, assumed the reins.

"But why the English?" questioned Barakah with irritation, for up to then the French alone had been a power in Egypt.

"Wallahi, just because their men are clever," was the answer. "They bought up all our Sovereign's shares in the canal. Their guile is great, but greater Allah's mercy, for the arrival of these Franks is good for me. Knowing both their languages I am put forward to receive them, and so rise in honour."

In fact, a few days later he was made a Pasha.

But Barakah could not regard the case thus philosophically. The intrusion of the English frightened her. If they should ever come to lord it in the country her degradation would be unendurable. She confided her displeasure to Muhammad, who took an interest in politics as schoolboys will. He bade her have no fear; the Muslims would destroy them presently. The women told her God would intervene. But things went rapidly from bad to worse.

Since a French force under Bonaparte had entered Cairo, before the era of Muhammad Ali, no such fury had possessed the world of women as that which

seized them on the deposition of the Khedive Ismaîl. Whatever touched the majesty of El Islâm excited them; vile infidels had here contrived the downfall of a Muslim ruler. And there ensued a host of innovations, in which the hand of unbelief was plainly visible.

The slave-trade had been formally abolished under Ismaîl, to please the Franks, but with the customary wink of that facetious monarch. The trade continued gaily with his sly connivance. Now, in his son's reign, it began to be suppressed in earnest. The slaves themselves were loud in lamentation. When it was known that slavery itself was menaced, the harîm chattered like ten thousand angry parrots.

"The Lord have mercy on us! It is gross impiety," screamed Fitnah Khânum. "Does not the august Corân lay down strict rules for the control of slaves? Is it not therefore Allah's will that they exist?"

"The trade in slaves is holy," cried Gulbeyzah; "bringing every year a thousand converts out of heathendom. If some are slain, it is no matter, since the death of heathens is uncounted, like the death of beasts. Without the cruel raids, the bloodshed, the survivors had not known salvation. Praise be to Allah, they cannot suppress the trade in us white people, since a father's right to sell his child resides in nature. Only since the English meddle do we hear such wickedness."

Besides the slave-trade, good old customs were

abolished — one ceremony called the trampling, in particular, in which a sheykh, renowned for piety, was wont to ride on horseback over strewn believers. Some people thought the world was coming to an end, and looked for the appearance of the final prophet. The times were full of omens, portents, monstrous births. The French and English, in collusion, gave command in Egypt; the monarch was a puppet in their hands. The apathy of men amazed the women looking on. The good Khedive appeared a devil to those hot non-combatants; rebellion a plain duty upon all believers. They prayed for a deliverer to be raised up; and in the absence of the prophet whom they half expected, applauded the exertions of a simple soldier, who ventured to oppose the wicked rulers.

With the exception of some Turks, who sneered from pride of race, the whole harîm acclaimed Arâbi from his first appearance as a champion. The women viewed the question very simply. Here, on one hand, was a man who wished to free the land from foreign interference, whose cry of Egypt for the Egyptians, must mean Egypt for the Muslims, since the Copts were nobody; on the other, an infirm, if not a wicked, ruler who was letting all the privilege of El Islâm be torn away. In vain their men assured them the Khedive was a good Muslim, and only deferential to the Franks from sheer expediency; that Arâbi's faction was the work of clever rascals, and boasted not one man of solid parts.

They took religious ground and would not listen. They taught their children to admire Arâbi. Muhammad, now a student in the school of war, assisted by his faithful Ali, fought five boys who dared to ridicule the peasant soldier. Though beaten many times the two did not give way, though Ali, for his own part, would have fled thrice over. But Muhammad was indomitable. Bruised and bleeding, he returned with fury to the charge, till his opponents fled in pure religious terror of such dauntless rage. A few weeks later the whole land was cringing before Arâbi's power. And then excitements followed thick and fast. Muhammad brought his mother all the latest rumours. One day it was:

"Great tidings, O my mother! All the Franks are flying! Ali and I have been to watch them at the railway station. Such a crowd! The faithful, past all patience, have risen up at Tantah and Iskenderîyeh and slain thousands of them."

A number of the loyal Turks were also flying. Amînah Khânum and Bedr-ul-Budûr came to take leave of Barakah. They were bound for Alexandria, in the train of the Khedive, and thence would take ship for Constantinople if things grew no better. Muhammad, when informed of their departure, rendered praise to Allah.

"They are vanquished," he remarked. "But would to Allah that we had more Turks on our side. These fellâhîn, though braggarts, are great cowards. They need the whip to urge them into battle. I,

who am half a Turk and half an Englishman, cannot endure the sluggishness of this Nile mud."

The boy forgot the portion of his blood which was derived from Fitnah Khânum, his paternal grandmother. It was Nile mud of the thickest, but it did not show in him. All hot and noble counsels moved him to enthusiasm; the lukewarm and the philosophical enraged his soul. Stupidity or insolence in an inferior he could not brook. If his commands were not obeyed at once and with intelligence, he struck hard with the first instrument that came to hand, and called down Allah's wrath on the offender. The old Pasha was delighted by those outbursts, as showing the commanding spirit of his Turkish race.

"When all these low-born troubles have passed over, we must procure him some small government," he said to Yûsuf, who acquiesced with a pathetic smile. He had not that supreme contempt for the Egyptian rebels which kept his aged father calm amid the storm. He held a good position, and he feared to lose it; whereas his father had retired from public life.

Barakah delighted in her son's account of the disorders. His excitement and the animation of each glance and gesture provided her with pictures upon which she brooded in the vacancy of summer days. The air which drifted through her lattice was oppressive, the sunlight like a furnace fire without; the voices of the street complained of dust and heat; the ceaseless buzz of flies benumbed the brain;

the call for water rang incessantly through all the house, and even Umm ed-Dahak felt too weak to talk. But Barakah was happy, since Muhammad spent much time with her, finding her conversation more congenial to his patriotic mood than that of Yûsuf. In his absence she lay still and smoked, and quenched her thirst at frequent intervals, taking scant notice of her little daughter — the only other of her many children who had managed to survive the second year. Umm ed-Dahak loved the child and schooled her privately, telling her stories of man's love and woman's duty, and teaching her to pose and ogle in the proper way. But for the rest she was of no importance; Muhammad's known affection for her was her only merit.

One afternoon Muhammad came in with a mien of wild excitement and, having kissed his mother's hand, cried out:

"Most dreadful news! O horror! O revenge! The English have destroyed Iskenderîyeh with their cruel guns! The English only, since the French, more honourable, fled from the hateful sight with tears of shame. Simply because the forts were being mended, and work was not relaxed at their command. But, praise to Allah, we have hurt them also. Quite half their fleet has been destroyed by our brave fire. After this, we give no quarter — no, by Allah! It is holy war. Muhammad Tewfik is proclaimed a scoundrel. Our Arâbi is Dictator. The army is to be augmented fourfold by forced levies. I met a

boy, no older than myself, who goes to fight. I go this minute to implore my father to let me likewise join the army in the field."

"Thy age is but fifteen. O Lord, he must not go!" cried out his mother in an agony of apprehension.

"I am a man full-grown, proficient in all exercises that belong to war. As young as I are going. Think, it is against the English, O my mother — thy vile enemies!"

Embracing her without a thought for her despair, he left her in great haste to find his father.

CHAPTER XXX

Yûsuf Pasha was upon the point of going out when his son was shown into his presence in his private room. He smiled upon the stripling's prayer to be allowed to fight, but said:

"No, no, my son. Thou art too young as yet. Wait till the war is ended and then join the fray."

With that he patted the boy's cheek, bestowed his blessing on him, and went out, little guessing that he left despair behind him. A carriage waited for him at the door. An armed slave scrambled up beside the driver. It was the hour of sunset. Two months since the ways would have been merry at that hour. But now the passengers were few and fully armed; they looked suspicious and, where groups were formed, the talk seemed guarded. A curse had fallen on the happy city. The sunset blushed on her high roofs, the crescent flashed on all her spires and domes, and in the gullies which were streets lay depths of shade; yet no one felt the rapture of the evening.

Yûsuf, lolling in the carriage, gnawed his black moustache and cursed the revolutionaries from his heart. He had attained the wisdom which comes

easily to middle age, hated disturbance and distrusted novelty. The nervous passion which had marked his youth still dwelt in him; but he reserved its transports for the calls of private life; having another wife besides the Englishwoman, and two concubines, whom he kept in the provincial centre whither public business often called him. Politics had been for him a well-ruled game, on which a man would be a fool to waste vitality. As a functionary, he had lounged on sofas, telling beads, dictating orders to his secretaries, at ease except when called before superiors; until this military rising scared his soul. Its swiftness and success seemed downright fiendish.

One day a painstaking, obedient native officer had been selected by the Khedive Ismaîl to organise a riot hostile to the Frank commissioners. He seemed so trusty and discreet that Ismaîl forbore to execute him for the trifling service. Within two years he was the idol of the native soldiers, the spokesman of their grievances against the foreign Turks; in five, he was the incubus and dread of Egypt, first Minister of War and now Dictator. That first employment recommended him to schemers as one who did not fear to lead rebellion. Straightforward and excitable, extremely zealous in whatever charge he undertook, he was thrust forward by the clever ones to posts of hazard. His prompters, Asiatics, saw the bounds of his intelligence and thought to keep him in their hands, a priceless instrument. But they had not allowed for the inflation of the African,

who, being once exalted, swelled and swelled until his greatness overawed its very founders.

An honest man and a good Muslim, Ahmad Arâbi lacked the cleverness of the conspirator; nor was he one. The sordid plots which guided his career were spun behind him; while he pressed onward with clear brow and conquering smile — a doomed man, in the view of calm spectators.

Yûsuf had known Arâbi for some years and liked him personally; but the Khedive Muhammad Tewfik was his friend from childhood. Entreated by the agitators to take office with them, he had referred the question to the good Khedive, who begged him to accept the post thus offered, that he (Muhammad Tewfik Pasha, Lord of Egypt) might have one friend among his so-called servants. Tied by his duties, he had not fled to Alexandria with the Sovereign; but remained behind in an absurd position, a member of the rebel government which he abhorred. He was now upon his way to meet some other Turks thus stranded, to decide on some safe line of future conduct.

The rendezvous was at his father's house, where, in the great reception-room, he found a score of men assembled. All had the faces of conspirators except his father, a very old man now, who bade them welcome as to some court function.

"Where is my son Hamdi?" asked the patriarch upon the dais, peering round upon the red-capped and black-coated throng.

"He is not with us. He has joined the fellâhîn. He dared not tell thee," answered Yûsuf sadly.

"Well, well," remarked Muhammad Pasha, with benignity. "Boys will be foolish! In Allah's name I bid you welcome, O my friends. It is well known that I myself despise these upstarts and have told their leader my opinion to his face. Less old, I should have spent my life and fortune for the young Khedive, whose ancestor, the great Muhammad Ali, raised my house to honour; as it is, I pray to God to grant him victory. But his dependence on the English likes me not; and God forbid that I should influence your counsels. You have, each one, his life and fortune to protect, his duty to decide towards El Islâm."

He stopped, and an uneasy silence reigned for quite a minute. It was broken by a man exclaiming, "They have set up a tribunal in each town with power to ruin or to kill a man on mere suspicion. Hear the wording of a document which I received this day."

With that, he took a paper from his breast and read aloud its contents — a call in truculent, inflated language upon the patriot Mahmûd the son of Hâfiz to show his fervour by a contribution to the war fund; failing which, he would be prosecuted as a foe to Egypt —"for the public safety."

"Aha!" laughed the old Pasha in his thin, cracked voice. "A French model, by my beard! For men who would eschew all foreign influence! That is the

hand of Tulbah, not Arâbi. The mountebanks! The silly children — apish imitators!"

"By your Excellency's leave the matter is extremely serious — for me at least," groaned out the owner of the notice.

"Thou wilt make the contribution?" inquired Yûsuf.

"Better flee," remarked another.

And then they all began to talk together in low whispers with frightened glances round the room, for spies were everywhere. Flight was now hopeless, every one agreed; nothing remained but to feign ardour in Arâbi's cause, give up communication with the loyalists at Alexandria, and pray for the usurper's overthrow.

"They cannot last, I tell you," chuckled the old Pasha. "These fellâhîn are quite unfit for government. The young Khedive has been too kind. He has not whipped them. My son and I were present when his father warned him to execute these men, his creatures, who had tasted power. A sad mistake, by Allah! For, Allah knows, we do not want the English in this land. My life-work, that of all the old diplomatists, has been to stave off European interference, by compliments, by guile, by small concessions. O Allah, let me die before the evil day! The Lord preserve us from the domination of the infidels!"

The old man dropped his hands and hung his head.

"Better the English than this present anarchy," another murmured. "Already the whole land is overrun by gangs of brigands. The streets here in the capital grow dangerous. There is no order kept except among the soldiers. All trade, all enterprise, is at a standstill, and every public undertaking goes to ruin. Already all the people hate Arâbi."

"The Lord deliver us," said Yûsuf, "from him and from the English both. A dreadful quandary!"

When he went forth to his carriage, still in waiting, he told his slave to have his pistols ready, and himself examined the revolver which he carried. He wrapped a shawl about his face to pass unrecognised and, thus protected and disguised, drove through the darkling streets, where every wayfarer betrayed the like anxiety. Only the street-dogs went about their work as usual, prowling along the walls in search of offal.

At his own door a man accosted him. It was one of his paid spies. He led the way across the hall into his private room.

"What news?" he questioned.

"May Allah turn it to thy good!" the spy replied, with his profoundest reverence. "I have it from a member of the new Committee that your Highness is marked down as a suspected notable. They say it may mean destitution, even death."

"I thank thee," murmured Yûsuf and dismissed the man. Directly he was gone he called Ghandûr and said:

"Didst thou not tell me, O beloved, that thou hadst some relative a member of the new Committee for the Public Safety?"

"Yes, O my lord! The person is my father's brother, a small merchant."

"Where is their place of meeting?"

"I can show it thee."

"Do they meet every day?"

"I think so, but will ascertain."

"Good. I shall wait upon them in the morning. At daybreak take ten pounds out of the treasury and carry it to thy relation to bespeak his favour."

"Has aught untoward happened?"

"Untoward? Listen!" Yûsuf told the story.

"Merciful Allah! How can such things be?" exclaimed Ghandûr. "We are the greatest in the land, they — filthy upstarts. How much does my good lord propose to give?"

"A thousand pounds were not too much to save my life."

"Deign but to hear my counsel! Give a hundred and ask leave for thy son to join the army. He is prostrated by thy late refusal. His going will prove more than any gift of money that thy heart is with the cause — which, Allah knows, may be the right one, since our lord has chosen to put trust in infidels. His mother even wishes it, to heal his chagrin. She sent for me and asked me to entreat your Excellency. We have good friends within the army who will see

that he is kept from fighting. My son shall go along with him, to be his servant."

Ghandûr, the simple creature, was in tears.

"By Allah, I will think about it," murmured Yûsuf.

Five minutes later he repaired to his son's room, revived the lad, and passing thence to the haramlik, told Barakah that her request was granted. She was half stunned, for she had counted on his obduracy.

Not noticing her dazed condition, for his mind ran still on puzzles of diplomacy, he added:

"Thou, who art English, O my sweet one, inform me of that nation! Are they harsh as conquerors? What is their custom with regard to vengeance? Do they burn and ravish, or merely punish those who have borne arms against them? It is important I should know beforehand if they win the day."

Barakah stared at him vaguely for a moment; then bursting into tears, exclaimed:

"Cut short thy life! O most unfeeling father! O appalling prospect! I would sooner die a thousand deaths than see them conquer."

"Merciful Allah, are they so fanatical?" gasped Yûsuf, with a face of great dismay. "I meant not to alarm thee, O beloved. I was thinking only of myself, how to behave in case things happened so, which God forbid!"

But Barakah thought only of their son.

CHAPTER XXXI

"A SPLENDID victory at Kafr ed-Dowâr! A thousand infidels despatched to Hell, and not a single blessed martyr gone to Paradise!" cried Umm ed-Dahak, entering her lady's presence on a summer evening. "Ghandûr has got the news-sheet, and craves leave to read it to thee."

The lady ordered him to be admitted instantly. Muhammad and his servant Ali were at Kafr ed-Dowâr. Drawing her head-veil so as to leave one eye visible, she listened to the short triumphant notice, which began and ended with "the praise to Allah!"

"The praise to Allah truly!" she suspired. "Not one was killed."

Ghandûr assured her then, as he had done a score of times, that Muhammad, with the blessing of the Highest, ran no danger. By arrangement with the leaders he was kept at work in the trenched camp, away from fighting. But her anxiety was not allayed, her boy was venturesome and, burning as he was to fight, might break through rules.

Every evening in Arâbi's journal there was news of some fresh triumph, either at Kafr ed-Dowâr, by Alexandria, or on the banks of the Canal, where the

main force of the English was now operating. She heard it said on all hands that the war would soon be over. Yet, though every one abounded in exultant phrases, no single soul appeared exceptionally cheerful; and she herself did not disguise her sorrow. The absence of Muhammad was a constant pain. She gave attention to her little daughter fitfully.

The weather was intensely hot, the town a desert full of dismal noises. So many men had been compelled to join the army, so many beasts of burden had been pressed for transport purposes, that trade was paralysed and traffic almost ceased. When she drove out, the aspect of the streets dismayed her; it was as if the city had been ravaged by a pestilence. The European, Syrian, Armenian quarters were utterly deserted, all the houses closed; and elsewhere there was very little movement. In other summers the harîm had gone into the country, and Barakah would gladly have drawn nearer to the seat of war; but her husband vetoed the proposal instantly, the country districts were unsafe and overrun by brigands. Yûsuf was irritable in those days. He had his bed in the selamlik and seldom could spare time to visit Barakah.

"I believe he has another woman somewhere," she told Umm ed-Dahak in a hopeless tone.

"It is his right, by Allah," answered the old woman; "and no slight to thee, if thou wouldst view it fairly, and throw aside the silly fiction of the Franks. It is the nature of a man to have more

wives than one, and a woman should no more resent his doing so — always provided he does not defraud her — than blame a cat for having several kittens at a birth. Ibrahîm, the father of the faithful, Mûsa — all the prophets till the crown of them (God bless and save him) married more than one. Polygamy was in the customs of the Jews and Christians until they fell away from El Islâm. Nay, a remembrance of it still exists among the Franks. For do not their religious women dwell together in one house, obedient to a rule like ours, attired like us, and call themselves — I ask pardon of the Lord — Harîm Allah (the wives of God)? Rank blasphemy, by Allah! Yet it shows that the old rule is not entirely lost."

Barakah was too disconsolate to be contentious. Let Muhammad but return to her in safety and she would not care though Yûsuf took a thousand wives; but in his absence everything seemed grievous.

A real sorrow overhung the house of Yûsuf; for the old Pasha was fast sinking to the grave. Hamdi, the hot disciple of Arâbi, the poet of rebellion, author of the famous calls to patriotism which were printed every week in the official journal, was bowed down by grief. He thought his siding with the malcontents had killed his father.

"But what was I to do?" he asked of Barakah, to whom, as an old friend, he took his troubles. "Their cries had fired my spirit. I could not keep

silent. Na'imah tells me not to worry, yet I feel most guilty."

Yûsuf, too, was downcast and repentant.

"We have been like fools," he sighed, "wasting in vanity the precious hours we might have spent with him — as if we thought that he would live for ever. Now the end draws near, we can but beat our breasts and curse our folly."

When Barakah went to the old palace to inquire, she was struck by the despairing looks of all the servants. A eunuch with a very woful smile conducted her to Fitnah Khânum, who exclaimed at sight of her:

"The praise to Allah, thou art come! Our lord has asked for thee. Murjânah was just going to despatch a messenger. Come! Come at once! There is no time to lose. He has refused to take a potion which I had prepared. He will not let a charm be hung upon him. He resigns his life to Allah. It is the end."

Murjânah Khânum sat beside the bed, holding the old man's hand. About the walls crouched many black-robed women, waiting in silence, like a flock of vultures.

"Here is the wife of Yûsuf," said Murjânah, giving place to Barakah.

The Pasha spoke in French. His voice was faint.

"Madame," he said, "I am about to die, and I am glad to be allowed to say adieu to you. Very

often have I thought of you and of your life among us. I feel a very grave responsibility. I trust that you have been, upon the whole, content."

Barakah declared herself quite happy, and he said, "Thank God!"

"But you will not leave us yet; you will recover," she exclaimed.

"No, no, my cherished daughter. My last hour has sounded. I have lived to see my lifework all undone. The Christians always sought a war with El Islâm. We kept a calm face under insults, even made concessions, as one gives a rabid dog a stick to worry." For a moment the worn face resumed its light of humour. "But now the war has come . . . Those rash fanatics! . . ."

There rose a murmur in the room.

"The Grand Mufti comes," announced Murjânah Khânum.

"Forgive me, dear madame. It is an old and cherished friend," the dying man suspired, with a faint smile. "Adieu! Adieu!"

And Barakah, with all the women save Murjânah Khânum, hurried out into the passage. At the door a tall and stately man brushed past her. His head was so erect beneath the massive turban, his long robe fell so straight from well-squared shoulders, that it astonished her to see his beard as white as snow. He passed into the room. The door was shut.

A minute later, Murjânah Khânum uttered a loud

cry; the Mufti came forth sobbing, with head bowed; the black-cowled women scurried shrieking to the death-room, where they instantly began the dance of death. They leapt and pirouetted, waving arms above their heads, with frenzied cries. Barakah was gazing horror-stricken at the sight, when some one took her hand and whispered, "Come away!"

It was Murjânah.

"I cannot bear these customs," she confessed. "The women of the country keep them in defiance of religion. It is useless to protest; one has to suffer. I am very tired, my dear; for I have not slept for many nights. Indeed, my weariness and grief are such that I can hardly look for rest save in the grave."

Barakah took coffee in Murjânah's room, and tried to comfort her. She too was sad. But her despair was turned to joy when that same day Muhammad rushed into her arms. He had been called by telegram. She held him back from her and gazed at him until he blushed and hung his head. The uniform, the high-crowned fez, the sword, the snowy gloves, embellished him. When she had gazed her fill, she made him tell her of the camp, his friends, his duties; and, started on that theme, he talked for hours.

"If only I could be transferred to the Canal!" he sighed. "That is the real centre of the war. The fighting where I am is empty show, and I am kept from taking part in it. Day after day, I have to

teach recruits, dull fellâhîn, who know not right from left. Instruction seems to make them stupider. I beat and beat them, till my arm aches. By my sword and valour, I could often kill them! Think, O my mother! — El Islâm is menaced, armed infidels have set foot in our land, and these men, Muslims, will not learn their exercises!"

His mother laughed at his impetuosity. She told his grandfather's last words to her, and how he feared the English would take hold of Egypt.

"There is no fear of that, in sh'Allah!" cried Muhammad. "Our faithful host will sweep them off like fleas. I wish I had been there to reassure the dear one. May Our Lord have mercy on him!"

The funeral of Muhammad Pasha Sâlih was among the greatest ever known, although the town was empty. The harassed population flocked to pay respect to one who had denounced Arâbi — a demonstration which could not be punished since sons of the dead man — nay, half his family — acclaimed the tyrant. In the front of the procession were led sheep and bullocks to be slaughtered at the tomb, their meat distributed among the needy in the name of the deceased. Then came hired chanters of the Corân, then half the male inhabitants of Cairo, walking, flanked by two thin lines of soldiers, then the male relations, then a choir of boys shrieking an ode in honour of the Prophet. Immediately behind these moved the lidless coffin, carried on men's shoulders,

with its coloured pall, and then the females of the family in shuttered carriages. A crowd of black-cowled women of the city, whose wailing sounded bird-like in the open air, brought up the rear.

The train, a mile long, wound out in the blinding sunlight over the sandhill to the city of the dead, from which at its approach the kites and crows went up, affrighted. There ensued a period of forced inaction, which to Barakah in the haramlik at the mausoleum seemed interminable. The ceaseless chanting in the tomb, the wailing of the crowd outside, attacked her nerves. Muhammad was to leave again that evening, and every minute she was parted from him seemed an hour. He was kept upon the men's side of the tomb; nor would she see him till they reached the house again; she had first to drive home in the stuffy carriage with Na'imah and two of the late Pasha's daughters. It was maddening.

In fact, she saw him only for a moment, ere he ran to catch his train. She wept a little at the disappointment, but his visit had relieved her of a weight of sorrow. She had only to despatch a telegram and he would come again. Moreover, she was now quite certain he was not in danger.

When told by Yûsuf that her drives must cease, because the horses had been taken for the army, she did not complain, but hired a donkey when she had to pay a call; nor could the prospect of a famine frighten her. Her mind had rest. Each evening

brought the news of an Egyptian victory. The English would be driven out. Her son was safe. Once more she joked and dreamt with Umm ed-Dahak.

CHAPTER XXXII

At Kafr ed-Dowâr Muhammad was kept drilling conscripts, relieving older officers who were required for actual fighting. Almost every day he heard the boom of cannon, the stirring noises of attack and skirmish; and often in his leisure moments he would perch in some high nook and watch the flashes, the white puffs of smoke, dispersed upon the green of level fields between the seacoast sandhills and the lake — a pretty sight. Beyond the plain of water skimmed by white-winged birds the town of Alexandria basked in sunlit haze. Upon the land-plain doves were wheeling round deserted villages, kites and vultures hovered high in air. Franks from the seaport rode out in the rearward of the English troops, and from the vantage-point of dykes and hillocks watched the operations through their field-glasses. The assaults, as he had told his mother, were not serious; mere "fantaziyeh" the old soldiers called them. The aim of the assailants was to keep a portion of Arâbi's troops from joining the main army on the banks of the Canal, where war was being waged in bitter earnest. Muhammad fretted at his dull employment. The atmosphere of strife, the bugle-calls, the march of men, no longer satisfied

him as at first. He wished to fight, and begged the general-in-chief, who favoured him, being a close friend of his uncle Hamdi, to move him to some post of danger. The great one laughed and patted him upon the back.

"We cannot spare thee yet from the recruits," he said. "That work is useful, and it must be done. Think, thou hast given us a thousand soldiers, none like them for rigidity and speed of motion."

Muhammad hated the recruits, who still were driven in by hundreds every day — men past their prime, and boys dragged from the wretched villages, and active rogues caught hiding in some ditch or patch of cane. The land had been already drained; the dregs were called for. And they were stupid, dazed, those fellâhîn; a flock of sheep has more intelligence! Muhammad, for whom soldiering was a religion and every detail of the drill had sanctity, was driven frantic by their apathy, their foolish stare. Dancing with fury, he reviled their mothers and beat them with his cane about the ears.

"By the Prophet, they are pigs!" he told the son of Ghandûr, who served him in his tent and hung upon his every word. "Here is El Islâm in danger; they are Muslims; yet they yawn and gape if asked to hold a gun. Ah! if I had a hundred Turks instead of them!"

The son of Ghandûr, who to please Muhammad would himself have put his head into a cannon's mouth, was horrified at the behaviour of the con-

scripts. That they could fail to see the light of inspiration on Muhammad's brow was proof sufficient of their utter baseness. For the same reason he despised the generals. Muhammad was more gifted for command than they, and yet they kept him ever at this menial task. Had Muhammad — or his foster-brother even — owned the leadership, Iskenderîyeh would long since have fallen, and all the English have been pushed into the sea. He dared to proffer this opinion to his lord one evening. But Muhammad in his wisdom answered:

"No, we cannot take the town, for this good reason, that a portion of their fleet, unseen from here, commands it, and would pour in shells to our destruction."

Ali received this information with head bowed and thanks to God. He prayed the Maker of the World to put some mind in the recruits in order that they too might profit by such high instruction.

It was usual at that time for officers to handle soldiers roughly on parade, caning them upon the head and shoulders, kicking them, and heaping on them every species of abuse. Muhammad might be called indulgent as commanders went; but he was over-much in earnest. His outbreaks lacked the touch of humour which endears. Old soldiers might have borne them with a laugh for the sake of his enthusiasm, which was very evident.

But these were men who had been driven from their homes like cattle, at the goad's point. For

days they had been herded up in pens in a provincial town, and there harangued by holy men and maddened by religious shouting till they lost what little wits remained to them and hardly knew a true believer from an infidel. Arâbi had proclaimed the golden age; yet here they were imprisoned, hounded, driven, and now subjected to the cuffs and insults of a shameless boy. Huddling together, they looked on with lowered brows, too scared to understand what the young Turk was shouting. Arâbi had proclaimed the Turks abolished. Where was reason? They gave forth inarticulate harsh cries like frightened beasts.

Each squad Muhammad handled seemed more stupid than the last — so stupid that one early morning an inspecting general advised him, laughing, to give drill a rest, and take them to the trenches; they were used to digging.

Muhammad felt the order as a whip-cut; he was furious. The general despised his work as an instructor, whereas God knew what trouble he had taken. It was all their fault. In the trenches he allowed them to do nothing right, but shrieked out contradictory orders emphasised by slashes of his cane. Slowly it dawned on them that he was quite alone; the place was hidden by high banks from supervision.

The daily pageant of attack was then in progress. The crackle of a volley came from no great distance. Muhammad implored Allah to direct the bullets so

as to kill them all, for they were worse than infidels. He did not notice the changed manner of their breathing, nor the new fire which smouldered in their eyes.

At a blow across the face, accompanied by frightful insults, a burly fellow seized Muhammad's wrists and deftly tripped him. The boy lay on his back bereft of speech. His captor knelt upon his belly, while the others crowded round like cattle interested. He could feel their breath.

"Hear, O my little son! Swear by the Sayyid Ahmad to be civil. It were best for thee."

Muhammad, with his pride undaunted, answered: "Sinful hog! I swear to have thee thrashed with the nailed whip and then decapitated. O Muslimîn! Do you not know that this is mutiny, an awful crime?"

"Then we must finish him," remarked his captor, with a sigh. "With his own sword! Here! Quickly, while I stop his screeching."

The speaker passed his hand down on Muhammad's mouth, while another drew the sword and plunged it several times into the prostrate form. They watched until the last convulsions ceased; then piously observed: "Our Lord have mercy on him! There is no power nor might save in Allah, the High, the Tremendous!"

"By Allah, he could bite!" observed his first assailant, shaking blood from his right hand. The palm was bitten through. He stopped to bandage

it; and then they made a litter with their spades and so conveyed the body back to camp with wailing.

"The darling of our souls is dead," they chanted. "Slain by the infidels, whom we repulsed. Our brother, Abdul Câder, too, is wounded in the hand."

The lie was quite transparent, yet it passed unquestioned. The high commanders shrugged and let it go. There were a hundred men concerned, with Allah knew how many sympathisers. They dreaded a stampede of all the conscripts in the camp.

When Ali, mad with grief, demanded justice, he was told to hold his tongue. The general was profoundly grieved; he shed some tears, and swore that every honour should be paid to the remains. A telegram was sent to Yûsuf Pasha announcing that his son had died a martyr, and that the blessed body was upon its way to Cairo. Within an hour of death it had been dressed for burial. It was carried in a fine procession to the railway, where a special train — a locomotive and an open truck — was waiting. The corpse was laid down in the truck, and covered with some tent-cloth; and Ali sat beside it, while the train sped hooting on past empty villages, where only a few children played upon the dust-heaps, a few women stood in doorways with hands shading eyes, past palm-groves and the fields of cotton and of sugar-cane until the citadel rose up before him in the evening sky.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The news was broken gently to the stricken mother. Yûsuf, overcoming his own grief, came in at noon and sat an hour with her, leading her up by little steps to view the glory that their son had died a martyr for the Faith. When the announcement came at length, the fortitude he had assumed gave way. He wept profusely. But Barakah was tearless. She sat rigid, with pale eyes staring vaguely in a face of stone. She asked that Ali, as soon as he arrived, might be sent in to her; and that was all. Umm ed-Dahak came and mumbled on her hand, moaning endearments which she did not hear. Then Ali was announced. At the same instant dreadful wailing filled the house. She drew her head-veil round her face (the movement had become instinctive) when he fell before her, pouring forth his awful story, concluding with the words: "The funeral sets forth this minute, O my lady. His body will not keep with all those wounds."

And then her anguish passed the bounds of suffering; she moved and looked and spoke, but felt no more.

Her women, half demented, danced around her. They tore their flesh with finger-nails, defiled their

faces, and raised an endless chant, reviewing all the charms and virtues of the dear one, his mother's love, the blackness of the world, each verse concluding with a shriek of "O calamity!" It was the triumph-song of death.

Robbed of the corpse, the funeral over, they thronged her chamber, keeping up the ghastly round, the death-chant, in the hope to give her tears. Her petrifaction filled them with dismay. To women who accept with rapture all life's chances, whose custom is to celebrate each blow that strikes them and magnify it as a witness to the power of God, her stony apathy appeared uncanny. They increased their efforts, while Umm ed-Dahak poured into her ear a song of memory designed to loose the frozen fountain of despair.

"She was the fairest daughter of the seed of Adam. See her now! Her feet, her finger-tips dropped perfume. She had the grace of flowers, the voice of turtles. Now behold her! In a moment blind and deaf and dumb and paralysed. And why? Alas, O thou who askest! it is because the sunshine of her life is fled. We saw her follow his dead body to the grave. As the cow pursues the calf that has been reft from her, so did she follow blindly with a noise of lowing. She has not even strength to beat her face. Her breath is painful, husky like the voice of doves; its sound is all the sobbing of the childless mother. Say, O beloved, what is in thy mind? Dost thou remember his tarbûsh, his yellow slippers, the

loveliness of all that touched his body, which was perfumed amber? There was a little mole upon his breast well known to thee. O Allah, waken memory, or grief will slay her!"

Barakah saw and heard as in a trance. She thought herself in Hell, bound fast and gagged while devils taunted her. She was tortured by the memory of English winter evenings, of walking back from church in the long train of orphans, the patter of their feet resounding sadly. That dreariness appeared a state of bliss compared with this luxurious life enclosed in heat. She longed for a cold wind, with rain in it. Remembrance of a garden under sunset came to her; she saw once more a cool verandah with long windows open on an English drawing-room, and heard the earnest voice of Mrs. Cameron entreating her to stay and save her soul. This was God's punishment. Her life from then till now had been all forwardness and self-indulgence. While basking in it she had been aware that it was baneful. A thousand awful faces rose to sneer, "We warned you!" The glimpses she had had of horrid depths, the scenes of bloodshed and the tales of cruelty, seemed now emphatic warnings of this end. She had sunk downward till she had no faith nor virtue more than beasts have. Her all was in her son, whom God had killed. Crushed, maimed, defrauded, she was flung upon the earth, the scorn of men and angels and the sport of fiends.

As by degrees her sense returned to her, she

looked about her with strange eyes and tried to think. But every effort was a sword that pierced her heart. One morning, peering dully through her lattice, she saw a gay pavilion in the yard, and leading to it rows of masts with lanterns hung between. They were erected for the meytam, or reception for the dead. She had seen them often when she visited great houses; but now her mind attached no meaning to them. It was two hours later, in the middle of the function, that her sense returned. A mighty gust of grief, a cry of "O calamity!" swept through the crowd of black-clad women in her great reception-room. It roused her mind. She saw, and was alarmed. What was she doing? What was all this crowd of people? Were they human?

The great saloon was full of women. The ladies sat up on the dais with flourished handkerchiefs, beating their breasts, their faces, at each burst of woe. Dependants crouched upon the ground and rocked incessantly, with foaming lips. Some faces wore a hideous fixed grin; some mouthed continually. The hired performers stood and chanted with obscene contortions, or squatted on a mat and wailed in chorus. The words "O my calamity," recurring in a sort of running chant without coherence, shook the assembly like a tempest-blast. And all the while dainties were being handed round by weeping servants, and accepted by the mourners as fresh cause for grief.

An ague of intense repugnance seized on Barakah.

She felt that she must fly from this inferno, must keep the hope of flight before her resolutely, or her soul was lost. It was as if a hostile hand compressed her throat. She struggled, was determined to get free. Towards that end she battled with instinctive cunning.

After the meytam, when she seemed exhausted, her brain, enamoured of this hope, was planning madly.

"Take heart, O moon of moons," the servants told her. "In sh'Allah thou shalt bring forth sons instead of him."

She strove to smile.

Her resolution was to leave her husband and her little daughter, the comfortable house, the easy life, to stray alone and homeless, back to Christian lands. There she would enter some religious order, and spend the residue of life in prayer for Muslims.

Every one was kind. The tender sympathy of Yûsuf, though himself hard stricken, might well have won her heart had she possessed one. Her heart was dead and buried in the grave. The ladies and her servants tried at first to cheer her; but when they found their efforts useless, let her be. Only Umm ed-Dahak remained with her constantly. Discreet as ever, she kept silence for long hours, watching her mistress with a doleful mow. They thought her too depressed to take a step unaided, had not the least suspicion of her wish to flee. It was, besides, a time of national anxiety, when every one who could

went out to seek the news, and those imprisoned listened to the noises of the street.

One day, in the full heat of noon, when men are sleepy, she sent out the old woman on an errand; and went and kissed her child, Afîfah, who was fast asleep. Then, having made sure that the slave-girls were not moving, she returned to her own room and donned a common habbarah, which she had sometimes worn when she went out with Umm ed-Dahak. From the store of money Yûsuf had entrusted to her she took sufficient to defray her fare to France, and hung it in a bag around her neck.

Thus furnished, she stole out through the selamlik hall. No eunuch challenged; the doorkeeper was snoring on his couch within the entry. Beside him lay the best part of a water-melon.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Barakah had not made many steps outside the house before she was completely lost. Although for sixteen years her home had been in Cairo, she had never walked in the streets before. Which was the way? She could not tell, but went on bravely, hoping for some guide. At last she met a donkey-driver with a pleasant face. In answer to her timid hail, he smiled delighted and praised his Maker for the honour of her patronage. "To the railway station," she enjoined at mounting, and he answered "Ready!"

Away they went, arousing echoes in the stony alleys, the driver shouting as he ran beside the ambling beast. Barakah felt exhilarated by the change of motion, the little spice of danger when they dashed round corners, or charged some group of wayfarers with warning cries. The first stage of her flight would soon be over; and once on board the train, she thought, escape was sure.

The streets were empty even for that hour. Scavenger dogs slept undisturbed in every spot of shade. The persons they encountered seemed to have no business, but stood about in groups conversing glumly. On the wide, dusty square before the rail-

way station groups were many. A little crowd beset the station doors. These were all closed, to Barakah's amazement. The building looked deserted.

"Ask when the next train starts for the sea-coast," she ordered her attendant, who addressed a shout to persons standing near.

"The sea-coast? Allah knows! It may be never!" The reply was shrugged. "A great fight has taken place. The end has come. The English fell upon the camp at daybreak — yesterday or this morning, Allah knows! The rebel army was dispersed like chaff. The leader — the arch-traitor — escaped hither on an engine, and is in the town now somewhere, herding with his kind. It is clearly seen how foully he deceived us, seducing us from our allegiance with the promise of success."

"Praise be to Allah that his reign is ended," said another. "If the English were but true believers, one would bless them."

"Nay, the tidings are not certain," cried the third with anguish.

"As certain as the sun is hot upon my reins this minute. I have it from a man who saw Arâbi. The rascal's face was yellow as a corpse."

Barakah's mind received no more than the initial statement. The way that she had meant to take was closed against her.

"Whither, my lady?" asked the donkey-boy, with willing smile.

"Far, far away — towards the sea-coast. Anywhere!"

"Ready!" he laughed. "It is for thee to order. By Allah, we will go to Gebel Câf if thou desire it."

He smote his donkey, and they jogged along once more, out through new suburbs to the open fields. The sun was an armed foe, the dust a persecutor; her habbarah and face-veil made a sheath of fire. The donkey-boy kept looking at her with compassion, smiling encouragement whenever he could meet her gaze. He thought her mad, and so indulged her fancy, assuring her that it would not take long to reach the sea. But when she murmured of the heat and wished to rest, he showed immense relief.

"That is the best," he cried. "Wait till I find some pleasant shade for thee. See, yonder is a tree. There thou shalt rest till the great heat is past, and then, at thy command, we can resume the journey."

Dismounting under leaves, she sank upon the ground and wept despairingly. The tears, which bitter grief had failed to wring from her, flowed freely for her impotence. Escape was hopeless. Her project now appeared the last absurdity. The change of clothes, the change of manners, now presented difficulties which she felt that she would never have the strength to overcome. The donkey-boy's consoling words, his friendly grin, were teasing. She sent him to fetch water from a village near at hand. He came back with a pitcher and two slabs of bread; which so revived her spirit that she once

more saw beyond the moment and conceived a plan.

She would wait till nightfall and then seek the city of the dead, to die on her son's grave, if Allah willed it. At least she would spend all the night in prayer imploring Allah's mercy for him in the name of Christ.

She had sat a long while, cross-legged, gazing straight before her, her hands locked in her lap, when a soft voice disturbed her. The donkey-boy was plucking at her sleeve.

"The heat is spent," he told her. "Best be moving! It is back into the city,— not so? — thy command? Much better than to journey to the sea, like this, without provision. Say, which way?"

Barakah pointed a direction listlessly. She had no wish to enter Cairo before dark, so chose a long way round, among the fields.

Soon the sunset reddened all the plain, stretching their shadows far before them on the dyke. The citadel upon its height was hotly flushed one minute, the next ash-grey and lifeless like a skull. It lived in her imagination as a monstrous spider which held her with its web and drew her in.

The donkey-boy beside her prattled ceaselessly.

"O lady, I will not forsake thee — no, by the Prophet, never, till thy mind is healed. Do I know the cemetery El Afîfi? Wallahi! I can guide thee thither. Not a bad idea; for Allah comforts those who visit the deceased. By the Sayyid Ahmad, thou

art as my mother. May God cut short my life if I desert thee in thy present state."

The lad's support was of some comfort to her.

In the first blue of night, when daylight lingers in the memory, they were following a sandy road towards the city, when a noise as of the sea arose behind them. The donkey-boy was first to hear it. He stood still and listened, holding up his hand. It seemed approaching on the road behind them. He looked puzzled; then suddenly let fall his hands, and made a bound.

"It is the army! Come, O my lady! We must hide ourselves. Hold fast!" He made the donkey gallop for a hundred yards, then led it down into a patch of cane. Peeping out between the stems they saw vague forms in clouds of dust approaching on the dyke above. The roar became the jangle of accoutrements, the roll of heavy carriages upon the road and murmuring voices.

Innumerable ranks of horsemen passed, dust-stained and weary, with faces resolutely strained towards Cairo. Barakah saw them as the figures of a dream. Their silhouette against the sky appeared familiar. The words with which they cheered their tired horses rang on memory.

"It is the English," whispered her companion hoarsely.

"The English! 'Allah, help me!" murmured Barakah. Until that moment she had lost remembrance of the war.

CHAPTER XXXV

The streets by night were full of people, in striking contrast with their emptiness at noon that day. The mosques were all alight inside, and from the glimpse which Barakah obtained through open doorways appeared crowded.

She saw men making towards them through the press, embracing precious bundles, with the look of fugitives.

"Their fear is of the English," said the donkey-boy. "Who knows what they will do by way of punishment?"

But the look on all the faces when a ray of light revealed them, the note of the vast murmur lapping the whole city, was rather of relief and comfort than anxiety. To hide away their treasures was a mere precaution which only madmen would neglect in presence of a conquering host; but men were thankful for the coming of the English, which meant an end to anarchy and wild suspense.

"Wallahi, they are warriors," one orator was declaiming at a street corner. "The fight was far away at daybreak, and now behold them here among us in the citadel. Wallahi, they are mighty! They smite hard — one blow and all is said. Wallahi,

they are not of those who loiter. They appeared among us like a vision of the rising night; they demanded the keys of our strong places as of right divine. The people in the street stood still and gaped on them, rubbing their eyes to ascertain that they were not asleep. May Allah make them merciful. The praise to Allah!"

The donkey-boy, who had been looking at the lady's eyes at frequent intervals as if in expectation of a change of purpose, asked at length.

"Whither shall I conduct thee, O my mistress? Is it not thy wish to return to the house?"

"I have no house," was her reply. "Did I not tell thee? To the El Afîfi cemetery!"

"Not by night! Hear reason, O my lady!" he besought her. "Tell me where thou dwellest, that I may conduct thee thither!"

"I go to the cemetery, as I told thee. It is necessary. If thou art weary of my service, I will pay thee and go out alone."

Barakah's tone grew plaintive, almost tearful. The resolution in her words was mere bravado. She knew that she was utterly dependent on this friendly youth, whose company alone kept up her courage. From the moment of her turning back she had felt stupid, useless, relying on this boy to bring her to the cemetery, where she hoped to die. It seemed a certainty that if she prayed her utmost, full as her heart was, the vexed soul must leave the body, and the prayer by sheer brute force become acceptable.

At thought of being baulked of her self-sacrifice, the boy's help failing, she began to whimper.

"Nay, dearest lady, weep not!" he entreated. "By Allah, thou shalt neither walk nor go alone. I will conduct thee thither; but it may be necessary that we wait till morning, since the way is lonely and the haunt of ginn. See here, before us is my mother's house. Deign to go in and rest awhile, and take refreshment, while I feed the donkey. I will make inquiries. If it is possible to go to-night, I swear to take thee. If not, thou canst rest here until the dawn."

They had stopped before a doorway in a narrow alley. He went a little way into the gloom and whispered:

"O my mother!"

"Is it thou, Selîm?" came back the answer.

"O my mother, come at once! I have a lady, a great lady in disguise. She has run mad through grief in these bad times, and wants to go out to the cemetery. Receive her in thy house a minute, feed her, talk to calm her; while I discover if the way is safe."

"The cemetery! Go not thither. Best come in and sleep."

"The lady is distraught with grief. I reverence her like a parent. She is absent from the world; she does not hear us. I think that she is going to the tombs to pray. It were a good deed to conduct her thither."

"True, wallahi! May Allah heal her soul, the poor one! These be dreadful times!"

A woman came out to the doorway, holding up an earthen lamp.

"Deign to enter, O my sweet," she called seductively.

Selîm assisted his employer to dismount.

"Go in and rest," he whispered. "My mother and my sister are alone in there. Thou canst unveil. The dwellings of the poor are all haramlik. In a little while I shall return and call thee from without. I go but to make sure the ways are safe."

The room in which she found herself was small and stuffy. It was lighted only by the little lamp the woman carried. Barakah was glad to loose her veil a while. She refused the food, but drank the water, which the women offered, and listened to their cordial blessings with a sense of dreaming. Her prayer was that the boy might not decide to wait till morning. Desire to reach the tomb at once obsorbed her life. Deprived of it, she would have had no further being. Her prayer now took the Christian form, and now the Muslim; the two religions growing tangled in her tired mind. At length the boy's voice sounded:

"Deign to come, O lady. The ways are thronged, they tell me, as in Ragab. To-night is not as other nights, it is well seen."

With praise to Allah she went out once more. But with its object now assured, her mind grew dull.

It was as if suspense alone had held it wakeful. It lost the comprehension of its purpose, regained it with an effort, and then let it go.

They passed beneath an ancient gateway. The city was behind them. Still there was no solitude. Groups of people crossed the sand in all directions. It was a moonless night. The many lanterns moving in the darkness seemed reflections of the stars which shone like gems of many facets in the silky sky. Barakah saw them both alike as golden insects swarming in the cup of a great purple flower. At moments, her head swimming, she mistook the earth for sky, and had the sense of moving upside down.

"There is the cemetery," said her guide. His whisper seemed to her a long way off. Nor did she see the city of the dead till they were in its streets, which seemed mysterious. The very stars looked sinister above the frowning domes, from which a blacker darkness seemed to emanate. The many crescents looked like horns against the sky. Bats flitted past her; from the distance came a jackal's howl. What had she come to do here? She could not remember. "To pray," she told herself, but that meant nothing. She strove with all her might to recollect. Then in a flash remembrance came to her; it bore her on, excited, to the mausoleum. She dismounted, and then, upon the threshold, she forgot once more. She entered, shuddering, too dazed to question why the gate was left ajar, and turned instinctively towards the women's quarters. A step

or two and she stood still in deadly terror, hardly venturing to breathe. There was a light upon the men's side; beasts were tethered in the court; she heard a sound of digging and men's voices. Her thought was, "They expect me, and have dug a grave." As soon as fear would let her, she fled back to where the guide was waiting.

"There are people. We must fly! Make haste!" she whispered.

He helped her to remount, and they retraced their steps. The solemn thoughts which had possessed her mind gave place to rattle of dry bones and impish laughter. A merry dance was going on within her brain, as mad as could be, though her senses were quite clear — clearer than ever they had been before, she knew exultantly. She rode out from the place of tombs across the sandhills towards the city.

"Hist!" said her companion suddenly, and stopped the donkey, hanging on to its tail to prevent braying. "There are men without a lantern — robbers! I hear voices."

She strained her ears in the direction pointed.

"Am I not acknowledged sheykh of all the thieves?" some unseen man amid the darkness was exclaiming angrily. "Was it not I alone who had the wisdom to foresee that every man would seek to hide his wealth this night? It is light work for you; they fly like conies at a shout, leaving their treasure, and the light for you to count it. Why then grumble that I sit here and receive the gold? Some

one must hold it for fair distribution. Say, have I ever wronged a man among you of one small piaster? See, yonder comes another lantern. Go, do your work, and say no more to me."

"Stay, O my lady! For the love of Allah," moaned Selîm. "They are robbers, murderers, the worst of ruffians."

But Barakah had urged the donkey forward; the laughter in her brain deriding fear. She headed straight towards the voices, waving her left arm and shouting madly. She heard a shriek of "The afrîtah! Help, O Allah!" and saw men running as if fiends pursued them. Her next sensation was a dive into the sand. The ass had stumbled. Selîm assisted her to rise, and murmured reassuring words which made her cry.

Remembrance of her little daughter overcame her. She had prayed to Christ to guard her child before she recollected that the prayer was useless. There was no mercy for disciples of the Arab prophet. She reeled and would have fallen had not Selîm caught her. As it was, she sank upon the ground, refusing to remount or take another step.

The boy, resigned, sat down beside her, holding his donkey by the halter-rope. They were upon the trodden plain below the citadel. Lying upon her back, she saw a blackness rising till it took the shape of bastions, walls, towers, surmounted by a dome and needle-pointed minarets. Gazing at this and at the stars she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was still night. The donkey-boy was snoring on the ground hard by. A chill and a strange silence hung about her. The stars above were throbbing violently as if about to burst in showers of light. Her grief returned on her like an ague. "O Lord, have mercy upon me!" she exclaimed, and groaned aloud.

"What ails thee, O my sister?" said a voice so sweet, so unexpected in its nearness, that it stopped her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVI

From the shadow of a mass of houses close at hand emerged the figure of a man in flowing robes, and glided towards her. For the moment she supposed it was an angel. Again the sweet voice thrilled her, asking:

"What ails thee, O my sister? Art thou wounded? May Allah heal and comfort thee in thy distress!"

She knew him then and felt a sudden craving.

"O Tâhir, sing to me!" she moaned. "Thy voice is healing. Canst thou still sing when thy delight is dead?"

"Who art thou, lady?" He peered hard at her.

"I am the English wife of Yûsuf Pasha."

"True; it is true," he murmured, recollecting. "I heard that she had fled the house distraught with grief. . . . Hearken, O my lady, I am waiting here for the muezzin of the Sultan Hasan mosque, to ask his leave to call the Dawn instead of him. Victorious infidels are on the height above us; and no man can predict the future of this land. It is a black day for the Faith, may Allah help us! Our souls are humbled, weeping tears of blood. I lay upon my bed, but could not sleep for thinking on this grief.

My heart and brain were full of singing, sad and noble. I felt the need to sing to God alone. And I vowed within my soul that none but Tâhir should call to prayer this dawn at yonder mosque within the shadow of the citadel which holds our shame. Now till my vow is paid I cannot guide thee. I beg thee enter the muezzin's house and rest till my return. . . . Ah, here he comes."

The thud as of a wooden bolt withdrawn, the creak of a door opening reached their ears. The singer ran in the direction of the sound. She heard him coaxing the muezzin, who replied upon a yawn:

"With honour and with reverence, O Tâhir! It is thine to order."

They had both drawn near to Barakah, entreating her to go indoors and rest, when the donkey-boy, aroused at last, rushed on them with stick raised.

"Where is my lady?" he cried out dementedly. "For the love of Allah, harm her not; her mind is troubled!"

They had some ado to reassure the lad, who was but half-awake. Tâhir renewed his prayer to Barakah to enter the muezzin's house without delay. She cried to be allowed to wait and hear his singing.

"Well, stay with her, O Mustafa! Bring cushions out! And thou, O best of donkey-drivers, seek the house of Yûsuf Pasha, inquire for one Ghandûr, and bring him hither!"

The boy bestrode his ass and disappeared into the darkness; the singer strode off, eager to perform his

vow. The muezzin fetched some cushions from his house, and led the lady through the gloom until the minaret of Sultan Hasan loomed before them, and Barakah could distinguish its projecting gallery. Then he spread the cushions as a couch, himself subsiding on the ground behind her.

Barakah waited for what seemed long hours, so great was her impatience, like the sharpest hunger. Then, suddenly, when she had almost ceased to hope, a high, sweet note, sustained most wonderfully, filled her ear. It caused a parting of the lips, a melting rapture. It broke in a cascade of melody. Then came the long sweet note again, not held this time, but uttered often with a sobbed insistence. And then the song soared up to heights of praise, or hovered over depths of sorrow; she was lost in it. Uprising from the fount of hope in sadness, it soared to certainty of endless joy. The sound was no made music, but a soul poured forth in glorious melody, as spontaneous and unerring as the song of birds. The greatest singer in the world stood there unseen in the suspended gallery, and sang his heart out to the praise of the Creator, watching the dawn's first gleam above the eastern hill.

On Barakah the song fell like a voice from heaven. She beheld great light. Her grief, her terrors, became natural shadows. There was one God for Christian and for Muslim. Beyond the striving and the hatred waited peace and love.

The professional muezzin on the ground behind

her was rocking with enjoyment, gasping, sobbing: "Enough, O Tâhir! Of thy kindness, stop! Wouldst kill me quite? I faint, expire! It is too much of rapture! See me die! Praise be to Allah for the faith of El Islâm. Praise to the benign Creator who has vouchsafed a voice to creatures for His glory!"

Another whispered: "That is no man's song, but the song of Israfîl. Surely the last day is dawning. Praise to Allah!" And yet another murmured: "Praise to Him who sleepeth not nor dieth, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Light of Lights, the Living King!"

Selîm the donkey-boy had come up with Ghandûr. They spoke no word to Barakah until the last note died. By then the pallor of the dawn shone on them faintly, showing the look of sadness which succeeds enchantment. Ghandûr then came and kissed the hand of Barakah, begging her of her kindness to return with him.

He and Selîm together lifted her on to the donkey.

As they left the square the English bugles sounded on the height above.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Quickly the daylight spread and filled the streets; while overhead successive darts of light pierced the incumbent darkness and dispelled it, till the sun's first ray reddened the minarets and plunged the streets in azure shade. Men came out from their doorways as from tombs, and went about their business listlessly. Among the lower classes it was quite expected that the English would take vengeance on the town that day. The people did not care; they were in Allah's hands, and gave Him thanks because the war was ended.

For Barakah the city wore its usual air; the only wretched figure was her own. She was being led back to a life which had become intolerable. After her tragic flight of yesterday, how ignominious was this meek return! Ghandûr, beside her, talked of the extreme anxiety in which her flight had plunged the Pasha's family.

"O my lady, how hadst thou the heart to cause us such despair? Think of it! One like thee, alone and in the streets at such a time, when all authority is an abeyance, and the English host may come at any moment with the lust of conquerors! A hun-

dred men were searching for thee through the night. My lord the Pasha thought that grief might lead thee to the place of tombs, and he himself went thither with the slaves enjoined to hide our valuables. Praise be to Allah, thou art found at last! Take comfort, O my lady! Often and often have I grieved for thee, alone among us! And when our great calamity befell — alas, that son of mine should bear such evil tidings! — I prayed to Allah to reveal to thee His boundless mercy. For it has no limits. For all who suffer in this world He will redress the balance. Even the unhorned cattle, O my lady! It is written."

Barakah heard these consolations as a dreary murmur.

"I am taking thee to the late Pasha's house, to the great lady," he informed her. "My lord considers it will be less sad for thee."

The great lady meant no other than Murjânah Khânum. Recalling the authority Murjânah wielded, Barakah imagined she was being led to punishment.

Two eunuchs came forth, bowing, crying, "Praise to Allah!" They helped her to dismount, and both supported her. A minute later she had passed the harîm screen. Her brief excursion in the world was ended. She was once more caged.

Imagining her crime to be as great as that of Christian nun in breaking convent, and knowing that Murjânah Khânum could be ruthless, she expected

torture; instead of which she was caressed and put to bed.

She had her lodging in Murjânah's rooms, was dosed by Fitnah, comforted by Leylah Khânum. The younger ladies came as visitors and talked to cheer her. Old Umm ed-Dahak, not to be excluded, crouched by her bed and crooned as to an infant.

"Why are you all so kind to me?" she asked one day. "I tried to flee, I tell you, to escape to Europe — yet you pet me!"

"All things are pardoned to great grief," replied Murjânah. "It was not thy fault, O poor one! Would to Allah I could show thee what I see more clearly than I see thee in this room — the power of God, His mercy all around us. Fain would I hear thee give Him praise for thy misfortune. He sees and knows; we fancy; it is weak to strive. Think, O my fawn, my lily, thou hast still one child; thou hadst thy boy for thy delight for fifteen years. More fortunate than I who lost all mine in infancy! What peace can come to woman in thy case who does not offer up her will to God? The men have promise of a certain paradise; we have no certitude of what awaits us. Yet we are not dejected, for we know God's mercy, and leave the future gladly in His hands. We women are not bargainers, we serve for love; and the mercy of the Highest cannot fail. Thou hast been brought up otherwise to prouder thoughts. Humble thy soul if thou wouldst find relief."

"I proud?" cried Barakah. "Thou, the proudest woman I have ever known, canst call me so? I am not as thou art — strong and dauntless, cruel in thy resignation. I am feeble and afraid."

"May Allah strengthen thee and drive out fear!"

Barakah had lost the vision which had come from Tâhir's singing — a vision which ignored divergences of race and custom. Without her son the harîm life was senseless; she held the Muslim faith in secret dread; and longed for sentimental Christian people. Yûsuf, her husband, proved the soul of kindness, yet she had almost hated him in her revolt from all his race.

One day he told the ladies in her presence:

"The English are not bad. They take wise measures for the land's redemption. They have asked me to take office, and I have a mind to do so."

It was the first time she had heard the English mentioned since her reimprisonment. In fact, the Turkish pride had suffered cruelly from this intrusion of a European power, the more so that the natives of the land acclaimed it. Though the English had restored their party in the State, the Turks in Egypt gnawed their lips and could not speak of them.

A new way of escape appeared to Barakah. She could obtain an audience of the English rulers and announce her longing to return to Christianity. She pined for the ideals of Christian lands, the independent life of women, and their varied interests.

Here she had lost her value, having lost her son. She would soon be an old woman, a mere worn-out animal.

Directly she conceived this plan, she grew more cheerful, and even felt some kindness for the harîm walls. While making her endeavour to find out from Yûsuf the names of Englishmen of influence, their character and reputation, she wanted to make certain he would be consoled.

"Light of my eyes," she whispered, nestling to him, "I have quite outgrown my foolish prejudice. I beg thee now to wed another wife. The son I bore to thee is dead, and I grow old."

"Wallahi, thou art still delicious," he replied gallantly; but all the same he thanked her, seeming much relieved.

Perceiving that the anguish of her grief was past, the ladies let her go to her own house.

"Remember my advice," said old Murjânah in farewell. "Behold, my eyes grow dim, my days are numbered. I speak not frivolously like the young. Give up thy will. That is to islam truly. May Allah grant thee resignation, which is strength."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

She had not been in her own house a day, before she said to Umm ed-Dahak:

"Wilt thou do me a great service?"

"Wallahi, that will I! Even — saving thy presence — one most sinful!"

"And canst thou keep a secret from the seed of Adam?"

"Not only that, but from the walls and air."

"I want a letter carried to a great one of the English."

"I seek refuge in Allah!" gasped the old woman, grinning widely. "Knowest thou it is a crime unheard of that thou askest of me? Fie upon thee! Wallahi, if I did my duty I should leave thee straightway!"

But far from flying from her mistress she came nearer. Her wrinkles ran to smiles; her old eyes twinkled.

"Come, let us reason!" she remarked, as she sat down, and, fingering her lady's hand, began the argument.

"If thou desirest recreation of a shameful kind, let me discover some devout believer. Thus the sin is less. Or better still, approach thy husband, tell

him thou art weary, implore him of his mercy to release thee, with a portion of thy dowry. No man would refuse the offer after years of marriage. Then I could find thee a good Muslim, for diversion. But a Frank — an unbeliever! Ask me not! It is too horrible!"

"By Allah, my desire is not the thing thou thinkest!" Barakah made answer gaily. "This Englishman is one I knew in childhood. I would speak with him. The matter is no other than my lord's advancement, though if he knew I meddled he would kill me!"

"Swear to that! But swear to that!" cried Umm ed-Dahak, much excited, "and I can do thy errand without sin. But if thy mind is for a Frank, I could unearth thee Muslims of that race; though most of them are idiotic from hashîsh."

"My errand is to this one only!"

"Good, I go."

The lady clapped her hands and called for writing things. The letter taxed her mind for hours; the fitting phrase, the correct tone, eluding one who for so many years had penned no word of English. At last it was completed. She implored the great official, of his mercy, his great kindness, to receive an English lady, long immured in the harîm, where she had suffered greatly. She wished to make a most important statement (this she underlined) and begged him to secure the utmost secrecy. She would not write her name for fear the letter should be inter-

cepted, but would reveal it to him with the other matter when they met. The document, enveloped and sealed down, was put into the hands of Umm ed-Dahak. After two hours, she brought back the answer, "To-morrow at the fourth hour," given her by word of mouth. She had not seen the Englishman himself.

"Wallahi, we will make thee beautiful," she chuckled.

Then Barakah reviewed her prison with affection. She went from room to room, observing for remembrance. In one, the slave-girls crouched round an old hag who told a story. The light which fell like powder from the lattice singled out their teeth and eyeballs, and woke a blue sheen in the copper vessels round the wall. In another, the child Afîfah stood up on the seat beside the lattice, feeding pigeons; the wife of Ghandûr, standing by, supported her. A little wicket in the tracery was open.

"H'm-h'm-h'm-h'm!" Afîfah gave the pigeon-call, and held out crumbs. A fluttering cloud of white and iridescent down, pink, shell-like claws, and avid beaks and eyes, beset the lattice from without, its shadow watering the child's delighted face.

Barakah retired without disturbing them. She had a hankering to take the little girl with her. But no, Afîfah was a child of El Islâm. Like all the rest, she would condemn and curse her mother.

Then visitors arrived — Gulbeyzah and Bedr-ul-Budûr — and Barakah waxed sentimental in her

talk with them, recalling all the pleasant hours which they had spent together. Both were now grown obese and double-chinned. Nothing remained of the resplendent beauty which had marked their girlhood save the eyes, which made them still attractive when they wore the face-veil. She pitied them, with anguish for herself; and kissed them fondly when they rose to go.

Then Yûsuf came to spend an hour with her. She thanked him with sincere emotion for his never failing kindness to her during all those years.

"It is nothing but thy due," he answered, greatly touched. "Thou art alone among us, and my cherished wife."

That night the very howling of the street-dogs sounded sweet; the starlight at her lattice seemed a humble friend. Her heart bled for the parting which was very near. For not a doubt existed in her mind but that the English, once informed of her desire for Christianity, would snatch her from the Muslims with a mighty hand. The power was theirs; they governed Egypt; and she knew from her remembrance that they were fanatical. They would welcome her conversion, and defend her.

In the morning Umm ed-Dahak bubbled over with excitement. She accompanied her lady to the bath, and bade the bath attendant take all measures to enhance her beauty. She assured her mistress in an eager whisper:

"Trust Umm ed-Dahak, I have managed everything."

She had given orders in her lady's name that the harîm carriage and a eunuch should be ready at a certain hour. She and Barakah were driven to a shop of good repute, famed for its stock of Frankish boots and gloves, of which the harîm ladies were enamoured as showing off their pretty hands and feet.

"Our business here may take some time — an hour, perhaps," she told the eunuch, who took position sentry-wise beside the entrance. The shop possessed two doors. Making a trifling purchase, they went out unnoticed, and found themselves within a stone's throw of the public office which the English ruler had appointed for the interview.

The street in blazing sunlight was flowing with a many-coloured crowd, which kept up such a jabber that Barakah could not think clearly. The scene she had rehearsed appeared ridiculous. Seized with panic, she was anxious to turn back; but Umm ed-Dahak at her elbow whispered courage. In a minute she had entered a great doorway leading to a wide stone hall, where soldiers lounged. One of them came forward at a beck from Umm ed-Dahak. Then the old woman went and squatted on the doorstep, and Barakah, half dead with terror, was led on alone.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"You asked for a private interview. It is a little unusual, I believe, in this country; but I granted your request upon the understanding that you have important secrets to communicate, as stated in your letter. Let me see — ah, here it is!"

The English official — a broad-shouldered, fresh-complexioned man inclined to baldness — having studied her appearance through a monocle, let fall that weapon and, disturbing papers on his desk, produced the letter she had written to him, which looked somehow pitiful.

"I am an English lady. My name is Mary Smith. I did a very wicked thing. I turned Mahometan, and married a Turkish gentleman, a Pasha, here in Cairo. I want to leave him and return to Christianity. I am an English lady, by name Mary Smith; not what they call me. I am prepared to take my oath that this is true, and Mrs. Cameron can tell you — I must get away!"

"What is all this, and who is Mrs. Cameron? In what way does your private history concern me? I beg you to pass on to the important statement which you have to make."

"I ask your help to get away from the harîm."

At that the Englishman resumed his eyeglass and surveyed her with a slight gape of amazement.

The scene of conversation was a large room, sparsely furnished with a desk, a table and a few plain chairs. The light from the high window shone on Barakah who, to prove that she was really English, had removed her face-veil. The critic's wondering stare first made her conscious of the discrepancy with her request of highly raddled cheeks and lips, and kohled eyes — the touches Umm ed-Dahak had declared so beautiful. She was not a European any longer. Her very words resounded with a foreign accent. From the moment of her entering the presence of this hateful man, she had been persuaded of the folly of her errand, out of heart with it. Her speech, when uttered, carried no conviction.

"Indeed, indeed, I am an Englishwoman," she persisted, with a kind of whimper. "I want to get away from here and lead a Christian life."

But while she spoke the words her hands were busy readjusting the white muslin mouth-veil as a step towards going.

The great official shrugged his shoulders. "Is that all you have to say?"

"Perhaps — I mean, I know that I did wrong to come here." She was quivering from head to foot with shame. The act of sitting on a chair embarrassed her. She was completely out of touch with English ways.

"Well, I don't quite see what I can do for you," said her appraiser, in a tone of bland reproach. "You see we are here as guardians of the laws and customs of the country. We could hardly, therefore, interfere in a case such as yours — a harîm quarrel. As for the religious controversy, I can tell you we avoid it like hot coals. Our one desire is to uphold the institutions of the country. Really, my dear lady, I think the only thing for you to do is to go straight home and make the best of it."

At that she rose. He passed before her to the door and held it open. She thought of offering her hand, but his grand bow forbade it; and she went out in profound humiliation.

"Well, art thou happy?" chuckled Umm ed-Dahak, still believing that she was the servant of a criminal intrigue. She prattled merrily till they regained the carriage and were driving homeward, when she noticed that her lady trembled and looked sad.

"Alas!" she cried. "My dove, my poor one, is it so? Woe, woe for womankind! There comes a time to all of us when love escapes."

But Barakah surveyed a wider disillusion.

Until just now she had been strong in the conceit that she was different from Eastern women, recognisably of higher race. From her dreams with Umm ed-Dahak, built on memories of Mrs. Cameron's entreaties and the Consul's arguments, she had derived the notion that she was of value to the English, who

would fain reclaim her. Now that mirage, born of the sleepy harîm atmosphere, was swept away; and she was nothing. With English people, she would always long for Orientals; with Orientals, feel a yearning for the life of Europe.

And in religion, likewise, she was nothing. A Christian by conviction after years of scoffing, she was doomed to play the part of a Mahometan, to lose her soul. And she was glad to be returning to the life so lately dreaded, the vision of herself in English eyes had so appalled her. Well, she was nothing, and her soul of small account. The harîm was her natural home; the teaching of the wise and kindly Prophet her protection. She now beheld the vanity of all her struggles, the vulgarity of much concern about the future. God was merciful! In self-annihilation there was peace. Thus through her striving after Christianity she reached at last the living heart of El Islâm.

CHAPTER XL

It was strange how, with her broken spirit, she regained a kindly interest in all around her. She had found the keynote of harîm existence — resignation; not merely passive, but exultant as an act of worship. The gross, full-blooded speech, the something cruel in these women, which in the day of sentimental pride had seemed intolerable, was but the natural outcome of relentless vision. In the first fervour of her self-abasement she stood beside the deathbed of Murjânah Khânum, watched her last struggle, and endured the death-room orgies without flinching. Thenceforth she took up the old Muslim standpoint, denouncing all the fallacies of Europe. Having won from Yûsuf the confession that he kept three other women, she had them brought to the old Pasha's palace, where she lived thenceforward, to rid his dealings of the surreptitiousness which smacks of vice. She received them sometimes in her rooms, and took benignant notice of their children, but remained aloof. They called her "the great lady," and deferred to her.

When the festivals of visitation of the dead came round, she would withdraw into the tomb for days together, but showed no mournfulness at other sea-

sons. When Englishwomen called on her (as sometimes happened, for Yûsuf held a high position in the Government), she spoke in stilted French, and never hinted that she knew their language, or was other than the thing she seemed — a Turkish lady. She felt assured that, had she carried out her plan and fled to Europe after her son's death, she would have gone mad in that sentimental atmosphere with all her memories. More than the English, she disliked some French and German ladies, who, without renouncing their religion or their nationality, had married Muslims. These, in their visits, showed a curiosity, and used a tone of patronage, which was offensive. Of races less exclusive than the English, they kept their European friends, maintained their liberty. They had no real conception of the harîm life.

She was angry with her daughter when the latter told her:

"At marriage I shall make my husband promise to have me alone before I yield to him. It is become the fashion in the noblest houses. Of course, if I should fail to bear a son, I should release him."

"Endeavour to retain him by thy charms," the mother scolded. "O foolish one, to make him promise is to make him sin. In following the madness of the Frankish women, thou dost but court deception in the Frankish manner. It all comes of the reading of French stories without knowledge or intelligence."

It vexed her soul to see young girls forsaking the old stately way to hanker for the trash of Europe, which they misconceived. Afîfah had no notion of that mutual love and comradeship which is the sole excuse for monogamic marriage; she merely thought it fine to be an only wife. When harîm ladies talked of feminine emancipation, they understood it to involve licentiousness. Their genius was at once too indolent and too direct ever to harbour European vapours.

But these vagaries were restricted to a score of wealthy houses, and even there the harîm life went on the same. There were the lattices, the veils, the eunuchs, and some few slaves in spite of many edicts; the ladies still had their old interests and rules and customs; the same old women hawked the news and bawdy tales from house to house; and superstition flourished more than ever. Young wives who had been bred up in the Frankish culture, and insisted on the husband taking French in private, consulted witches when the baby ailed, or sent a portion of his clothing to be bloodstained at a zâr.

Afîfah married in due course a high official, and Barakah spent half the year with her. The mother had her little circle of old friends, and many protégés — in particular the house of Ghandûr, whose first-born, Ali, she regarded always as her son. Her age seemed not unhappy.

On a summer evening, she was sitting on the roof of the old Pasha's palace, watching the sunset with

Gulbeyzah, Na'îmah, and two of Yûsuf's sisters who had come to visit her. Red light as of a conflagration shone around them. The shadow east towards them by the parapet was vastly elongated and as black as ink. A tray with fruit and sherbet rested on the ground, and a slave-girl, squatting on her heels before them, awaiting their good pleasure to remove it, followed their conversation with an eager smile.

The English had been five-and-twenty years in Cairo, and mighty changes had distressed the world of men, but the harîm seemed changeless in its calm seclusion. Beliefs as old as Egypt lingered there, and new things introduced were made to serve old customs. Yet the ladies had been sighing at the growth of innovations.

"Dost thou remember, O my sweet one, the little window in the servants' passage where I used to sit and dream as a young maiden?" sighed Gulbeyzah. "Is it still there? I must go down and see it! And the little lover on the roof who waved his arms so wildly? I wonder did he die of me, the poor young man! Thou didst blame me for that small amusement; but, by Allah, girls in these days are less innocent. My granddaughters read French books till their brains are addled. They had better sit alone and dream as I did."

"The best of life is thinking with hands idle," answered Na'îmah. "All women do it, and so form their minds. But the girls to-day have no resources.

They despise embroidery. They needs must be amused by some strange sight, excited by unhealthy reading, or they die of ennui."

"Look, look!" exclaimed Gulbeyzah suddenly.

They all stared in the direction which her finger pointed.

The slave, who had been waiting their good pleasure to remove the tray, had started up and stood against the parapet, looking out towards the sunset, with her back towards them. Both her arms were raised as for an incantation. The rosy light enveloped her as with a halo. Her shadow, grown enormous, covered half the roof.

"I seek refuge in Allah. Is she worshipping the sun?" gasped Na'imah. "She should be punished for such gross impiety."

"She is going to give that crow his salutation," said Gulbeyzah.

The bird had wheeled away, but now drew near again.

> "If good the news, O bird, alight and welcome;
> If bad, draw up thy claws and hie away!"

The slave-girl having chanted the time-honoured formula, turned to resume her attitude of patient waiting. She grinned to find herself the object of all eyes.

"I shamed him," she remarked, with a wide flash of teeth, as she sat down once more.

"Thou knowest the history — not so, O my flower?" said Na'imah.

"Umm ed-Dahak has related it a thousand times — the Lord have mercy on her!" Barakah made answer in a tone of fond remembrance.

"O light of my eyes, surely every woman here in Egypt knows it!" giggled Yûsuf's youngest sister. "They say it has been handed down among us from the days of our lord Noah, when we sent up the petition."

"That every girl might be allowed four husbands?" asked Gulbeyzah.

"More! more! — or so old Umm ed-Dahak used to tell me — as many as she could endure, my sweet!" laughed Barakah.

"May Allah destroy the house of that most wicked crow, who has kept us waiting all these thousands of long years till now!" groaned Na'imah.

"How long! How long, O Lord!" sighed out Gulbeyzah in a comic ecstasy.

"Never in my time, that is certain, under Allah," answered Barakah. "But perhaps you young ones . . ."

"Young ones! O Allah, listen to her! Ah, alas for us!" cried Yûsuf's youngest sister, with a sobbing laugh. Whereat the ladies looked into each other's faces, illumined by the greenish light which follows sunset. A silence and a shudder fell upon them.

"Allah have mercy on us!" Gulbeyzah broke the stillness with a shrug. "Behold us finished for the joys of this low world."

"The praise to Allah!" answered Na'imah devoutly.

They were all old withered bodies, for the grave.

THE END